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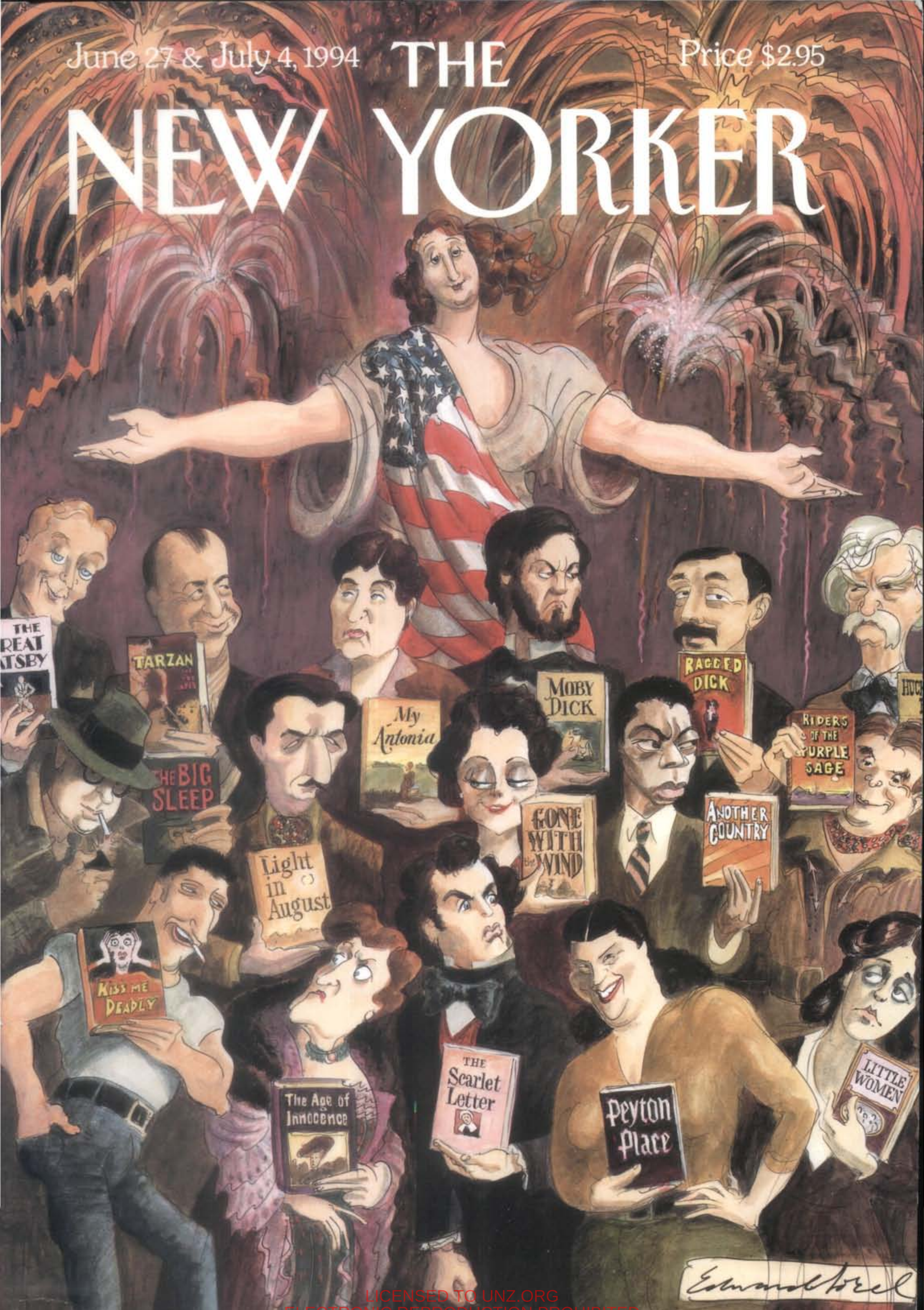
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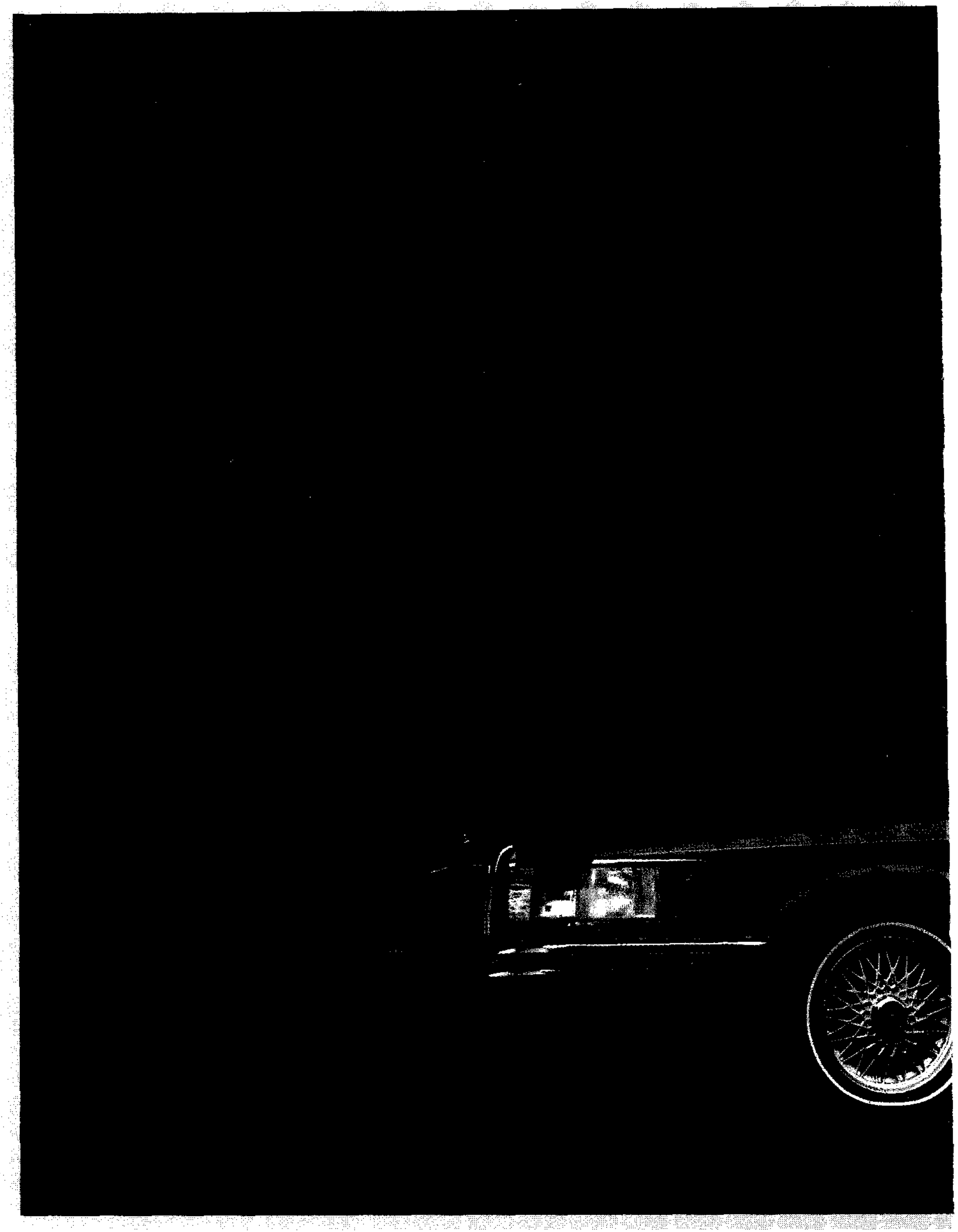

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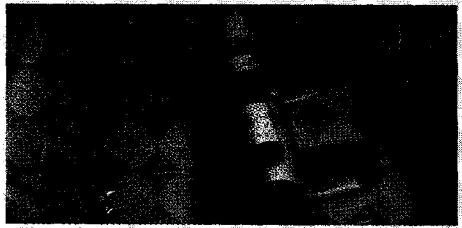

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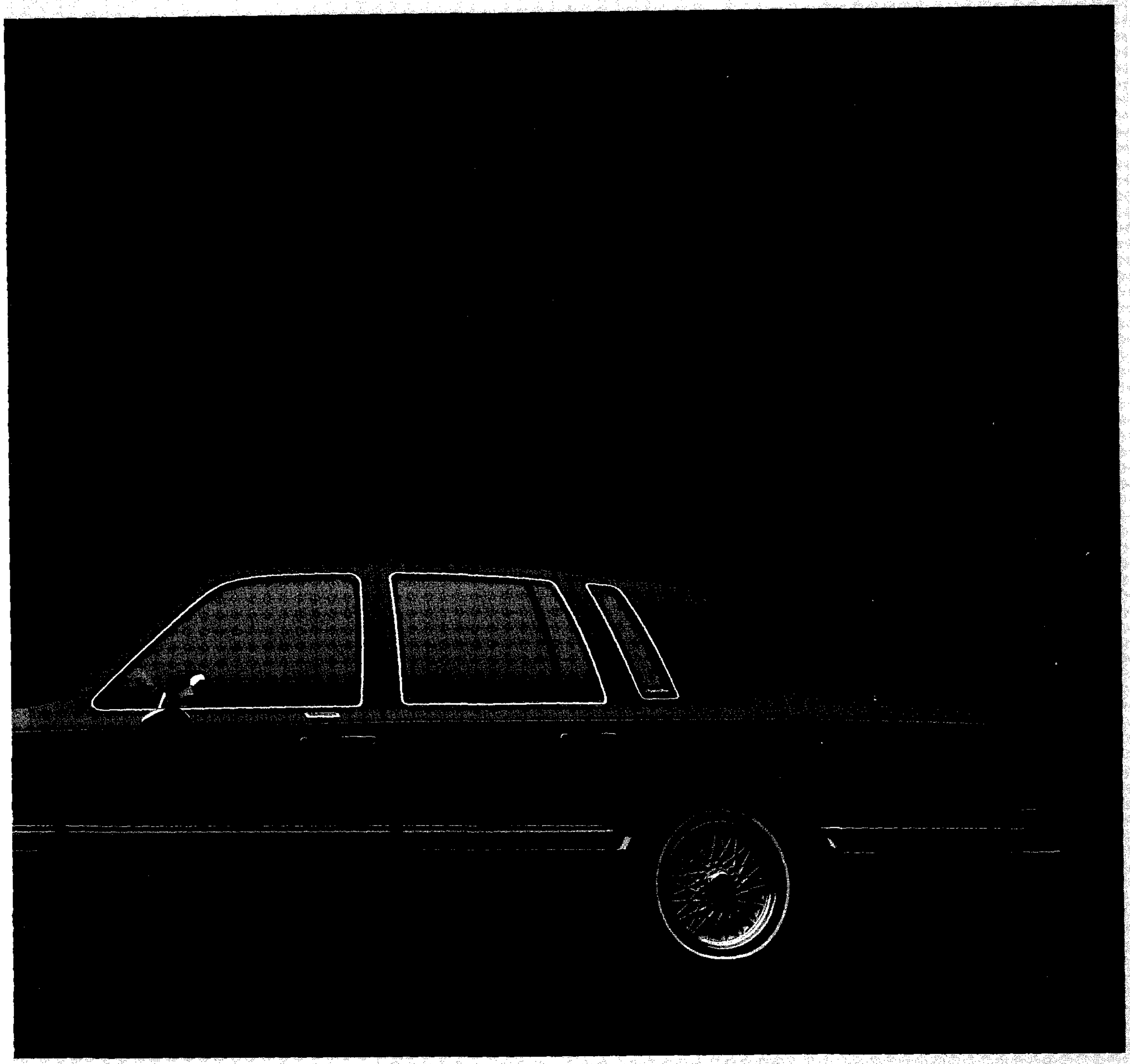

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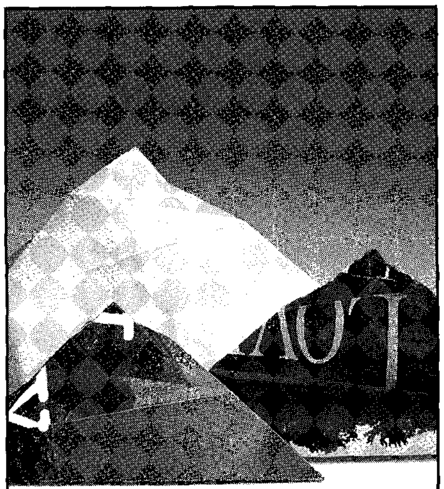

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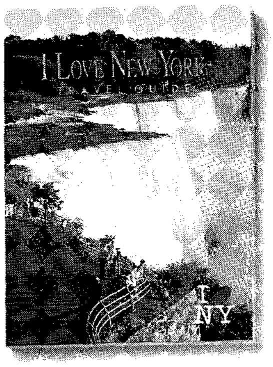

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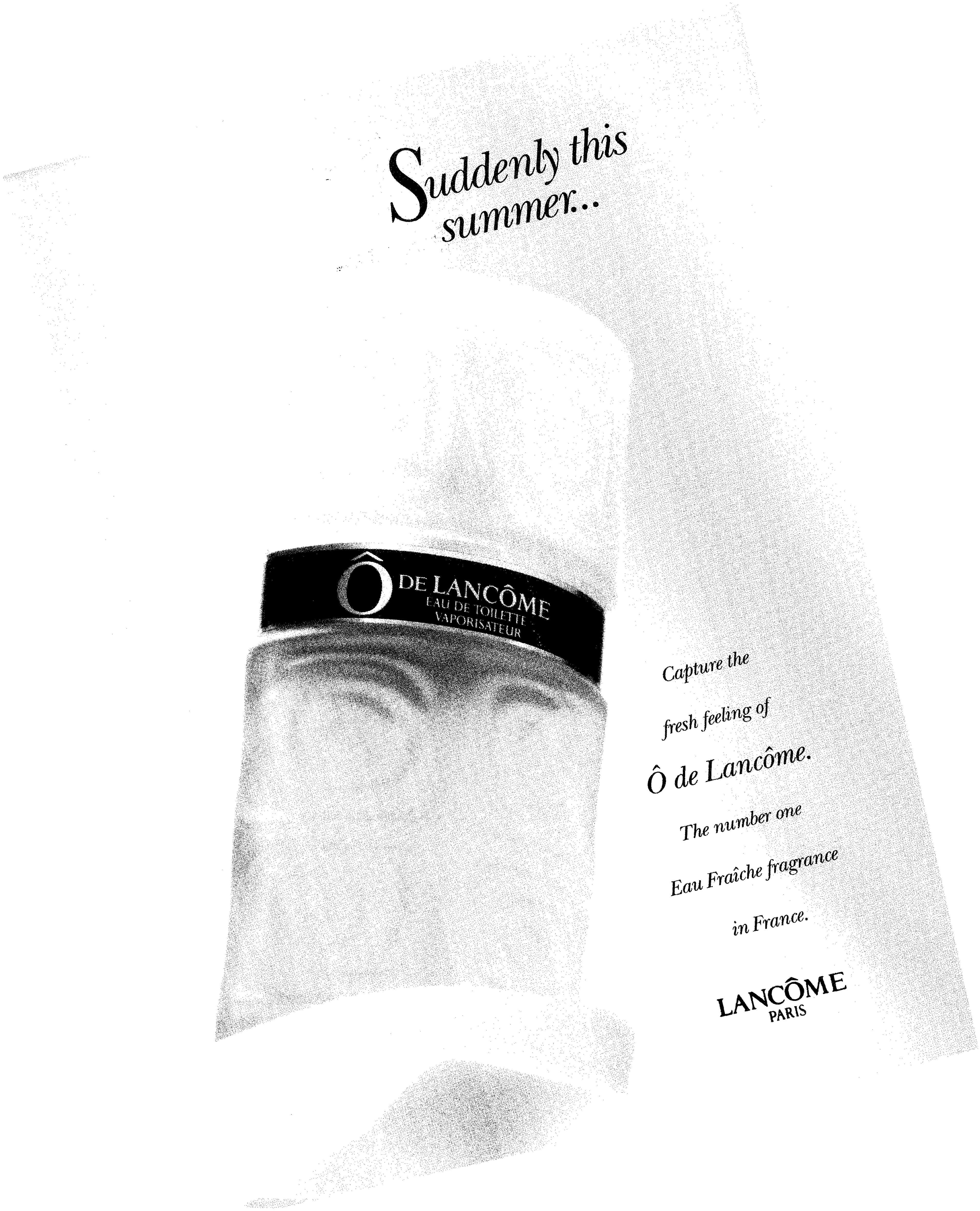

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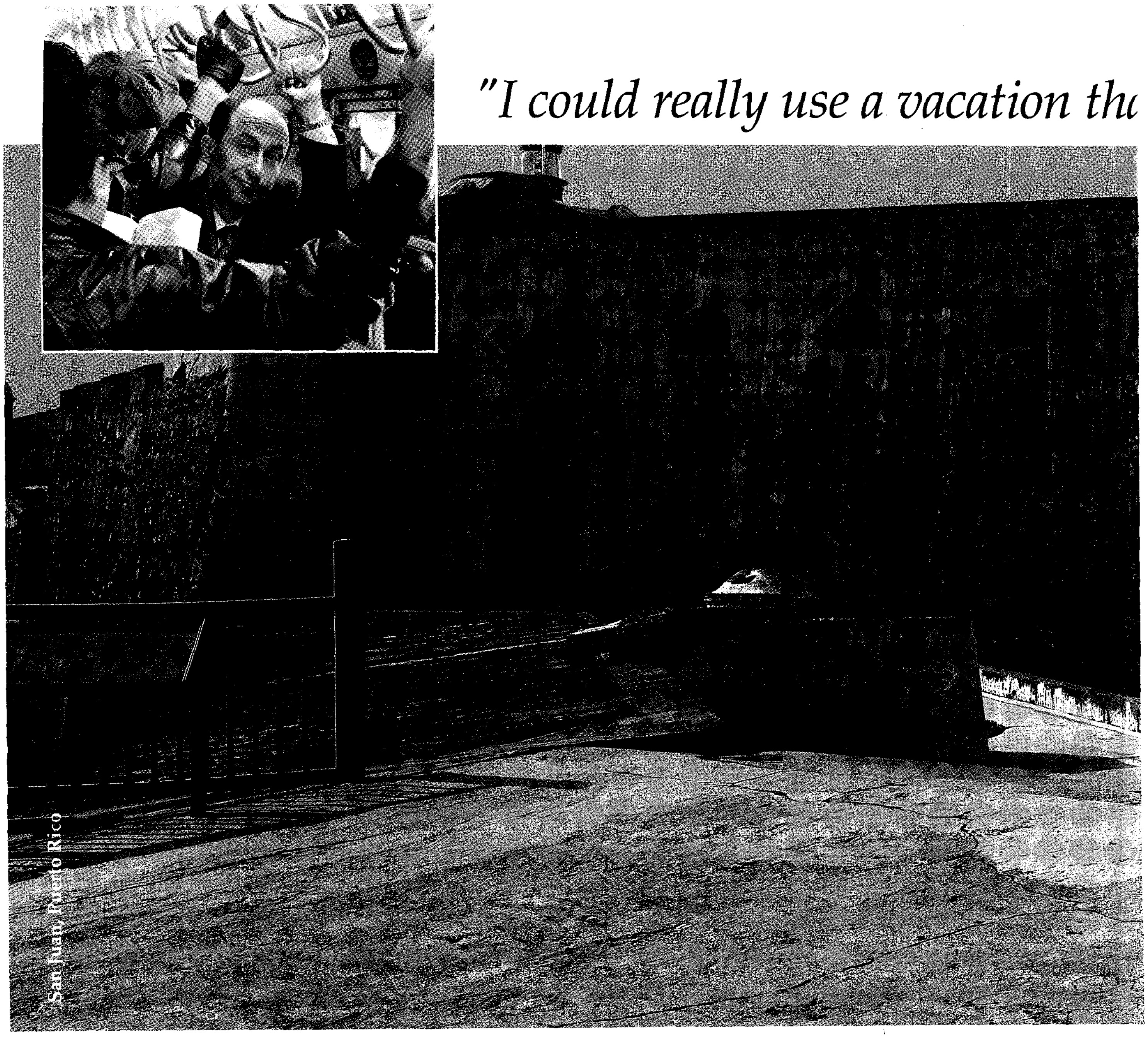

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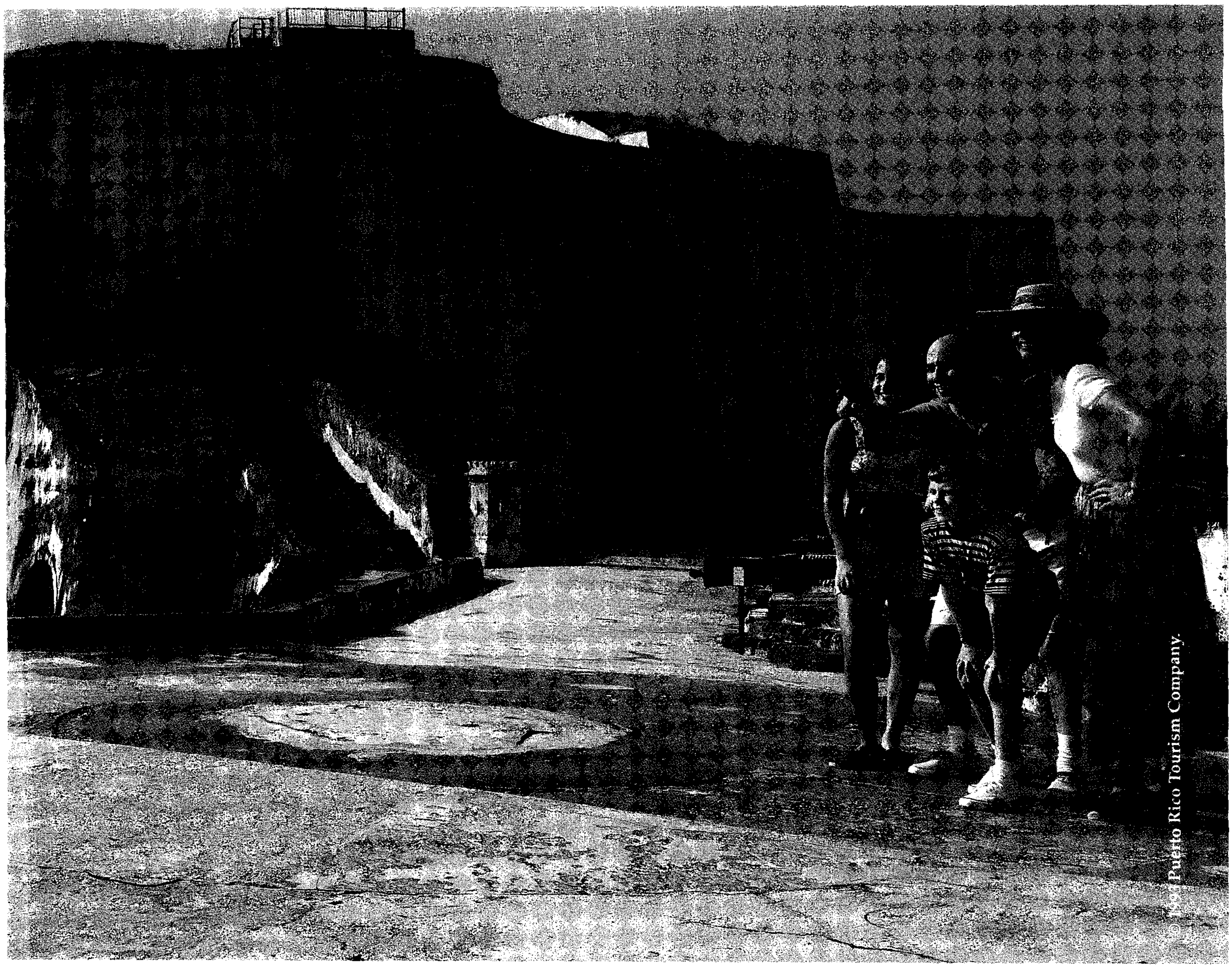
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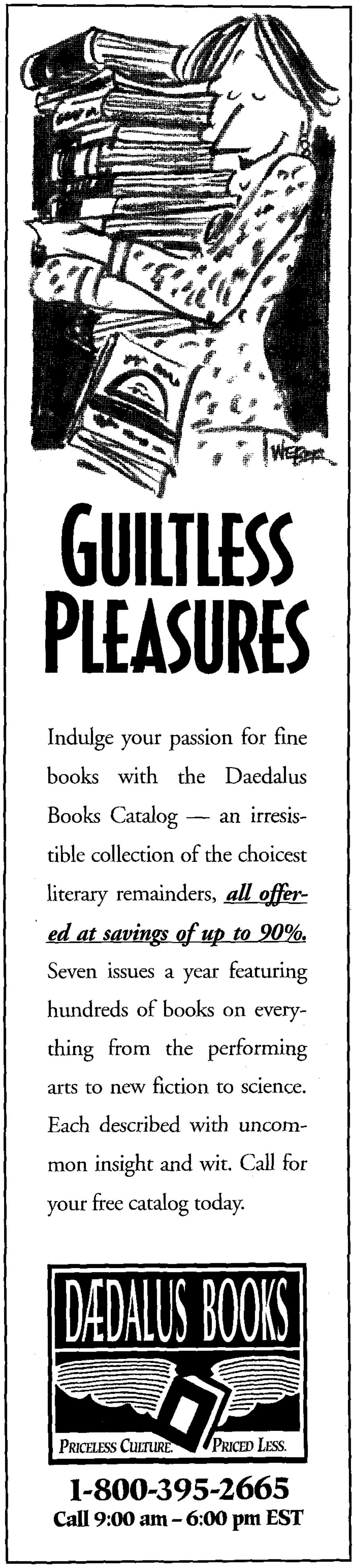

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COMMENT

MADE-UP STORIES

THERE are those, believe it or not, who think it odd to find fiction—made-up stories—in a weekly journalistic magazine, particularly one that makes something of a fetish of the sanctity of fact. Yet fiction—fiction in a riot of forms, from classical short stories to symbolist collages, from character studies to pinwheel-eyed lampoons—always has been, and always will be, as essential to the body and soul of *The New Yorker* as essays and reporting, reviews and cartoons. Stories get published here because stories please us, and although we've never taken any polls or convened any focus groups on the subject, we gather that they please some of our readers, too. We know, for example, that there are people who picked up their first copy of *The New Yorker* on account of a story or a "casual"—on account of something by O'Hara or Cheever or Salinger or Perelman or Munro or Updike—and only later, and gradually, became aware that other kinds of writing were on offer in these pages, too. We know this because some of those people are now members of our staff.

It is a commonplace that there are truths that only fiction can tell, because fiction is written from the inside out. But at a less exalted, more professionally parochial level, there is a conviction here that, in some elusive but intuitively undeniable way, the fiction makes the nonfiction better. This is not just because the style of reporting pioneered and developed in this magazine over its nearly seventy years of existence draws heavily on the aesthetic techniques of fiction—the setting of scenes, the delineation of character, the unfolding of narrative—and occasionally rises, or aspires to rise, to the level of literature. It is also because the very presence of good fiction sets a standard that its workaday neighbors, sharing the same paper and ink and staples, would rather not fall too far below. The fiction is the cavalry, with plumed hats and epaulets, and the nonfiction is the infantry; but the cause is the same, and in this special issue the fiction leads the parade. ♦

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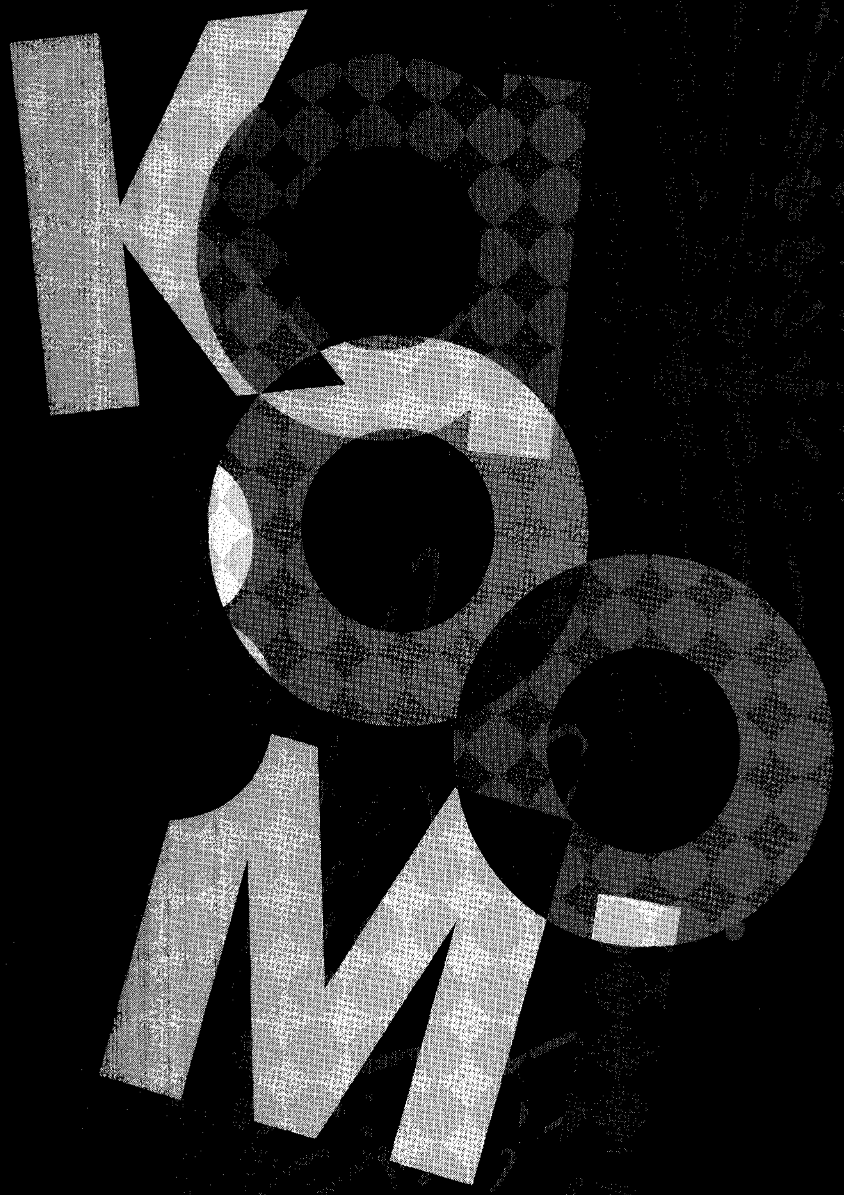

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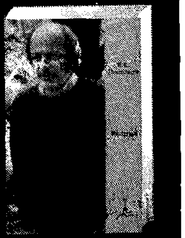

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FACING THE PAST

Stephen Schiff ("The Ultimate Exile," May 23rd) correctly notes V. S. Naipaul's passionate dislike for those who wipe away history—"trampling on the past," Naipaul calls it in "A Bend in the River." Yet Naipaul is "unashamedly" a lover of Western civilization, the very civilization that wiped out entire peoples in the Americas and trampled on Asian and African civilizations with no regard for their cultures and histories. Naipaul is the product of a post-colonial Western society that teaches Third Worlders to hate themselves. Conveniently, he is free to criticize the world, but it is not free to criticize him. It is he who has failed to come to terms with his past. His world, his views, his books—everything points to a man trying to trample on his own past.

Shakil Ahmed
New Haven, Conn.

V. S. Naipaul can indeed be a fastidious sourpuss. For a year in London I studied his life and his works, but I could never find an answer to the big question: Why in the world does this thin-skinned man, so riddled by tics and tormented by phobias, travel at all?

Stephen Schiff's keen-eyed portrait suggested an answer. Naipaul travels because, like a modern Marlow, he cannot stop looking directly into his obsessive subject, the "heart of darkness." Readers and critics continue to take Naipaul to task for his "excessive pessimism" or his "mandarin" diagnoses of the so-called Third World. In fact, his writings explore the reality of political deception, personal delusion, and the widespread inability to face the past.

Dennis Dalman
Alexandria, Minn.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

In "Mr. Bellow's Planet" (The Talk of the Town, May 23rd) Saul Bellow cites an article by George Schuyler when he asserts that "the blacks have always been convinced that they have remained inert and passive while everybody else rose in life and used them as a stepping stone." Who of "the blacks" is Mr. Bellow talking about? I, for one, can't afford to consider myself anybody's "stepping stone." I'm too busy struggling to survive and to remain clear about the forces that compel other Americans to exploit African-Americans. I realize that there doesn't need to be a Jewish conspiracy. Economic deprivation, color caste, class snobbery, and ethnic chauvinism render *any* conspiracy redundant. (Didn't James Baldwin say all this already?)

Perhaps Mr. Bellow's myopia stems from his willingness to discuss African-Americans in a romantic lump of low expectation, or maybe it's from his reliance for his information about African-Americans on the speeches and writings of people who, while significant in the tradition of African-American arts and letters, are, when all is said and done, men, intellectuals, and privileged. Some African-Americans write articles. Some make speeches. Others of us are asking questions, such as, How is it that this culture decides who will speak for "the blacks"?

Madeline D. Murray
New York City

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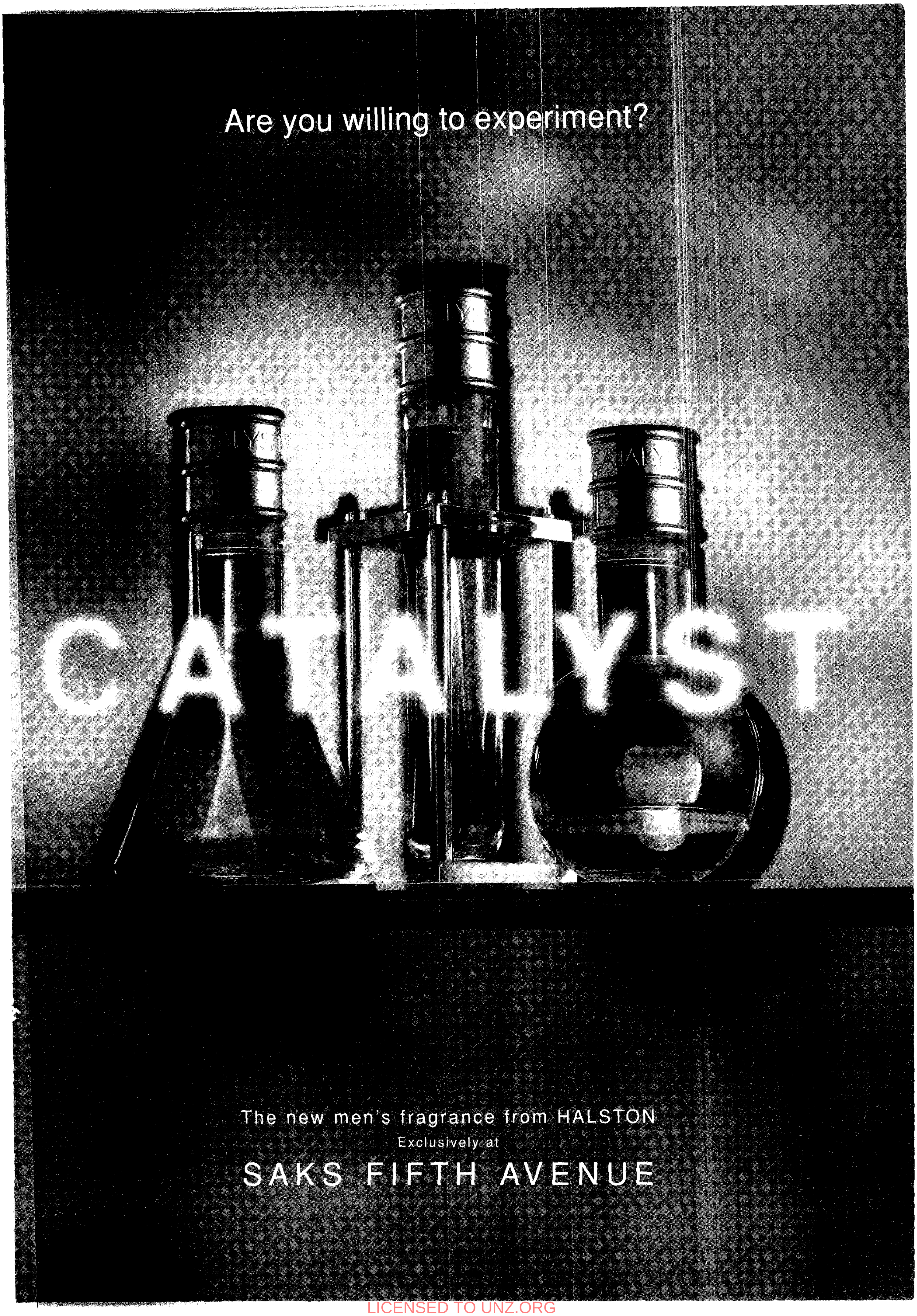
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

Fast Learner

Andrea Martin knows very little about Shakespeare, and just because she's set to begin previews in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," at Central Park's Delacorte Theatre, doesn't mean she's going to hide that fact. "I didn't know the play at all," she confesses. "And the text itself wasn't much help at first. I had to get the Cliffs Notes." Once she realized, however, that her character, the loquacious, word-confused Mistress Quickly, was the kind of ditsy comic type she's played a hundred times before—on "SCTV," in movies, and, most recently, in her Tony-winning turn in the 1993 Broadway musical "My Favorite Year"—she began to relax.

Martin was also happy to learn that Quickly speaks mostly in prose, so no one is likely to criticize her verse-speaking, and that the director, Daniel Sullivan, has given the production a familiar, very playable setting: the California Gold Rush. She says that one thing still worries her, though: "I've done so much improv in my life that I'm usually not fazed if I forget something. But here, if I go up on a line, I can't rely on those skills." In other words, she'd be hard-pressed to ad-lib anything as daffy as an exchange Quickly has with Falstaff about Mistress Ford. Martin delivers its bawdiest lines in fine Mrs. Malaprop fashion: "She does so take on with her men; they mistook their erection."

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

The Family of Mann—A dark comedy by Theresa Rebeck about sitcom writers. Directed by Pamela Berlin. Previews through June 27. Opens June 28 at 8. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103.)

Hedda Gabler—Kelly McGillis has the title role in Henrik Ibsen's 1890 psychological thriller. Directed by Sarah Pia Anderson. Previews through June 28. Opens June 29 at 7. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

The Merry Wives of Windsor—Shakespeare's comedy has been set during the California Gold Rush. With David Alan Grier, Andrea Martin, Brian Murray, Tonya Pinkins, and Margaret Whitton; directed by Daniel Sullivan. Previews begin June 23. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 861-7277.)

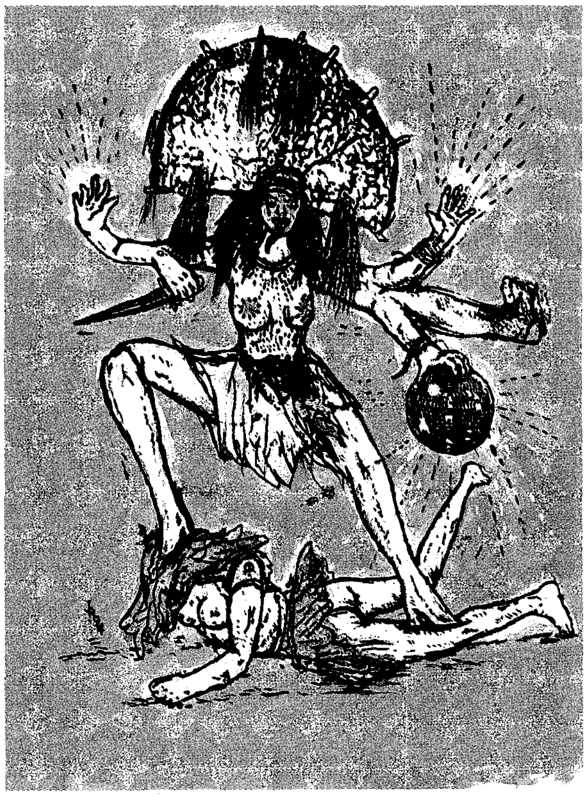
Police Boys—Marion McClinton's play is set in a police precinct. Directed by Donald Douglass. Opens June 22 at 8 and runs through July 3. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

The Spirit Moves—Trazana Beverly stars as a young woman exploring her past in order to rid herself of guilt. Directed by A. Dean Irby. Previews June 23-25. Opens June 26 at 3. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 598-0400.)

The Truth About Ruth—A musical satire about a bearded lady, starring Peter Morris, who also wrote the book and lyrics. Previews begin June 28. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 691-6226.)

OPENED RECENTLY

All in the Timing—Six sparkling short plays by David Ives add up to one enchanted evening. Ives and the deft director, Jason McConnell Buzas, are wonderfully served by their actors, especially Robert Stanton and Nancy Opel. Wendy Lawless, Ted Neustadt, and Michael Countryman do their part to keep the proceedings cruising along at top speed. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)



Lucy Payjack and Don Luna in "Wrath of Kali."

Beauty and the Beast—Disney's Broadway money-spinner, adapted from the animated-film version, has a few moments of solid-gold theatrical amazement: the showstopping "Be Our Guest" production number and the Beast's transformation into the Prince at the finale. Directed by Robert Jess Roth. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/2/94.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100.)

Blown Sideways Through Life—In her sixty-fifth job, Claudia Shear charmingly and observantly tells us about her previous sixty-four, which have ranged from working in a hardware store to being a "phone girl" at a whorehouse, with a stint as a Bloomingdale's cosmetics salesgirl thrown in. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 989-2285. After a brief hiatus, performances resume on June 23.)

Box Office of the Damned!—A musical comedy about working in a theatre box office. Written by Michael James Ogborn; directed by Barry McNabb. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 254-2258.)

Broken Glass—Arthur Miller has found a metaphor for the cycle of blame that seems to have stalemated modern life: the hysterical paralysis of a devoted wife. This short, discursive, but compelling play features strong performances by Amy Irving, Ron Rifkin, David Dukes, and George N. Martin. John Tillinger directed. (5/9/94) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes June 26.)

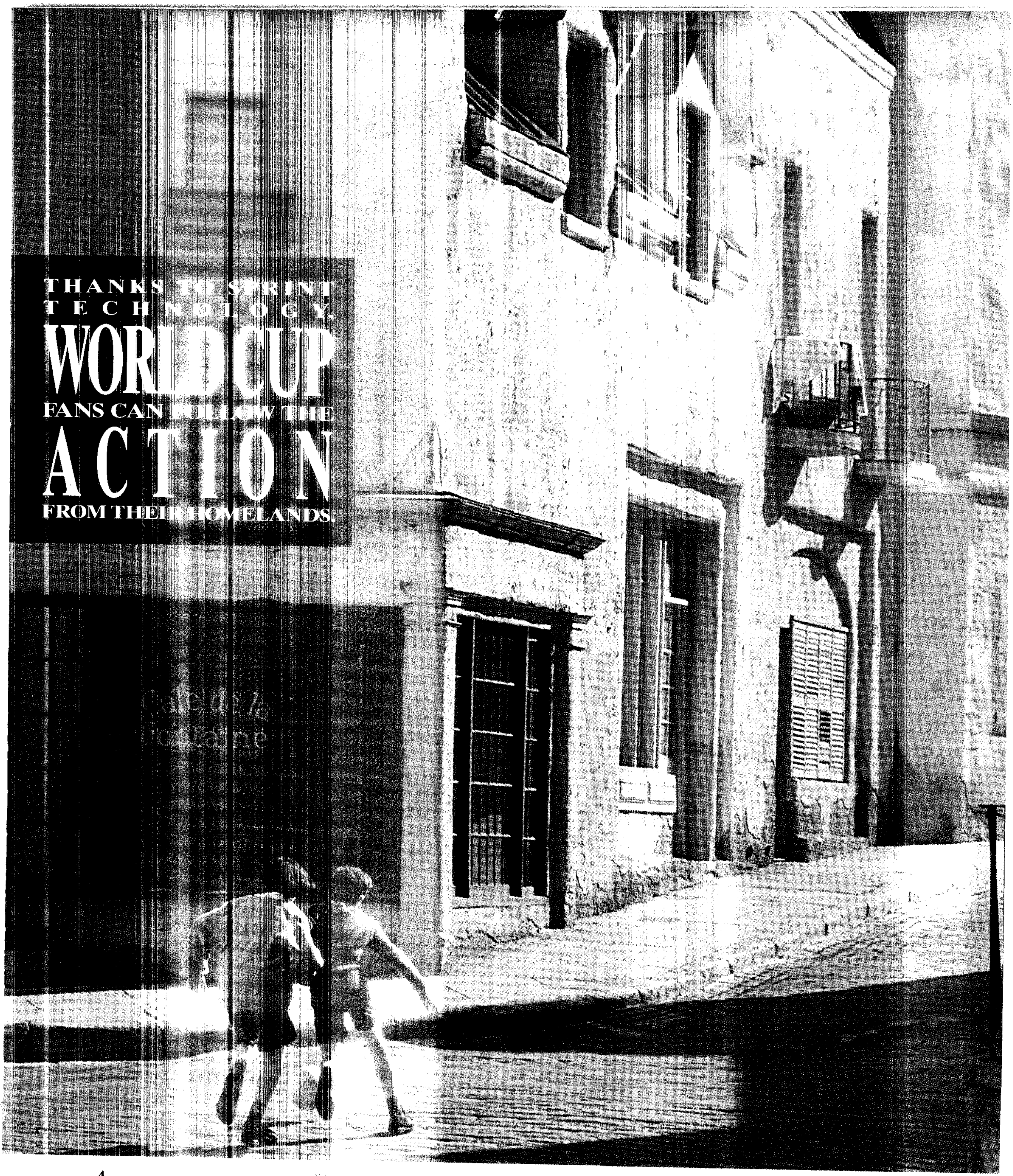
Carousel—Nicholas Hytner's authoritative direction combines with Bob Crowley's inspired sets to transplant the National Theatre's 1993 smash hit onto the Vivian Beaumont stage. Bold, beautiful, and controversial, this multicultural reinterpretation launches Rodgers and Hammerstein toward the twenty-first century. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Damn Yankees—The big musical hit of 1955 is back, in its first Broadway revival, with Victor Garber as the Devil and Bebe Neuwirth as Lola. George Abbott and Douglass Wallop's book has been jarringly updated by the director, Jack O'Brien (with the help of the hundred-and-six-year-old Mr. Abbott). The result is a vehicle that swerves between fifties stodginess and nineties cynicism. But the cast delivers Richard Adler and Jerry Ross's music with sporty energy, and Rob Marshall has created some lively dance numbers. (4/4/94) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Family Secrets—Sherry Glaser is the sole, physically adept, very funny performer in this comedy about a Jewish family, which she wrote with Greg Howells. (Westside Theatre, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

Four Dogs and a Bone—The "bone" of John Patrick Shanley's satiric comedy is a movie, and the "four dogs" are its

JONATHAN ROSEN



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producer, writer, and two actresses, who together make the funniest foursome in town. (11/15/93) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 924-8782.)

Gray's Anatomy—A return engagement of Spalding Gray's autobiographical monologue. Directed by Renée Shafransky. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes June 27.)

Grease!—The talented cast and the inventive production team show off the gleeful phonyness of Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey's musical with unembarrassed affection, and the result is a fun fake that's not trying to pass as the real thing. Rosie O'Donnell is very likable as the tough-talking Rizzo, and Billy Porter blows the lid off the joint with his Little Richard-like rendition of "Beauty School Dropout." The set, a riot of Day-Glo colors, is by John Arnone, and the lighting and the witty costumes are by Howell Binkley and Willa Kim, respectively. Jeff Calhoun directed and choreographed. (5/30/94) (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Hollywood Hustle—A one-man show by former TV executive Jeremiah Bosgang. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 334-0962. Closes June 26.)

Hysterical Blindness and Other Southern Tragedies That Have Plagued My Life Thus Far—An autobiographical musical-comedy revue written by, and starring, Leslie Jordan. It's a tale of growing up Tennessean, thespian, and gay. Joe Patrick Ward's energetic musical numbers run the gamut from corn to gospel. Directed by Carolyne Barry. (Playhouse on Vandam, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555.)

An Inspector Calls—J. B. Priestley's 1945 mystery is not really a play—it's a speech, about every man's link to every other man. The fine cast, which includes Kenneth Cranham, Philip Bosco, and Jane Adams, has ideas, not actions, to play. Directed by Stephen Daldry. (5/16/94) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Jackie Mason: Politically Incorrect—A former rabbi from a family of rabbis, Mason uses the stage as his bully pulpit. Behind his shtick, which is sometimes vulgar but always funny, is a fundamentalist disgust at the world's fraud, wickedness, hypocrisy, and inhumanity. (4/25/94) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

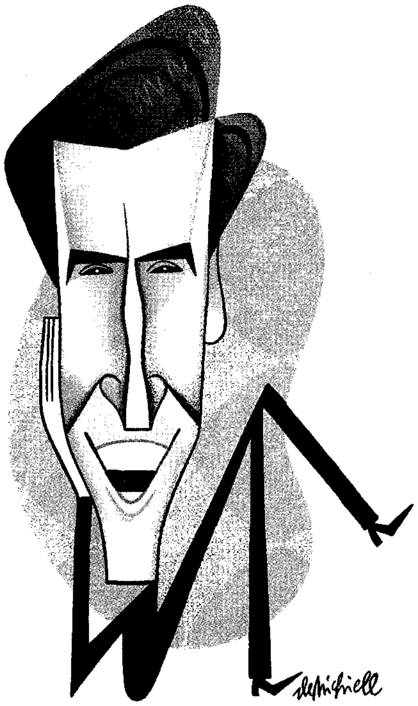
Kindertransport—Dana Ivey stars in Diane Samuels' moving play about a woman who was among the ten thousand children evacuated from Europe and brought to England on the eve of the Second World War. As the play moves back and forth between the present and the past, the costs of survival and of denial become painfully clear. Patricia Kilgarriff brings spine and spark to the role of the English housewife who takes in the young refugee. Directed by Abigail Morris. (6/6/94) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes June 30.)

Laughter on the 23rd Floor—Neil Simon's twenty-seventh Broadway play, about a group of writers for a fictionalized version of "Your Show of Shows," is one of his finest comic efforts. Directed by Jerry Zaks, with Mark Linn-Baker, Lewis J. Stadlen, Nathan Lane, Ron Orbach, John Slattery, and J. K. Simmons. (12/20/93) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Man Is Man—The Independent Theatre Company's first-rate production of Bertolt Brecht's play. Directed by Michelle Gigante. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088. Closes June 25.)

Medea—Diana Rigg gives a magnetic performance in this production of Euripides' tragedy, an import from London's Almeida Theatre, under the direction of Jonathan Kent. There's a thrilling electrical charge whenever Rigg is onstage, and grief and horror are also conveyed by Peter J. Davison's powerful, dramatic set. With Tim Oliver Woodward as Jason, Janet Henfrey, John Turner, and Donald Douglas. (4/25/94) (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200. Closes June 26.)

Merrily We Roll Along—Stephen Sondheim's 1981 musical about a show-biz sellout, based on the Kaufman and Hart play of the same name, has been given a spirited revival by Susan H. Schulman. A few new songs have been added, but no amount of spirit can disguise the essential sourness of George Furth's book. As the story moves backward in time, from the mid-seventies to the late fifties, the characters progress from shrill bitterness to wide-eyed innocence and the show hammers home its dubious point, which seems to be that being an adult is a bummer. With Malcolm Gets, Adam Heller, Amy Ryder, and Michele Pawk. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 534-5366. Closes July 17.)



PAUL RUDNICK, *more than any other current contender, has earned the title of Reigning Humorist, New York Division. With recent screenplays ("Addams Family Values" and "Jeffrey," based on his hit stage version) and the column he writes every month for "Premiere" (under the nom de kvetch Libby Gelman-Waxner), he shows no sign of drying up. Rudnick's new play, "The Naked Truth," has just opened at the WPA. The story of a Mapplethorpe-like photographer and his struggle with socialite-driven censorship, it displays everything Rudnick has learned about eliciting laughter, with triple-decker jokes in particular abundance—a suitable taste for the writer's sour-pickle sensibility.*

Milk and Honey—A revised version of Jerry Herman's 1961 musical. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 644-9797. Closes June 26.)

Movieland—In Everett Quinton's latest outing, Mr. Q. plays a character called Ruby Stevens (attention, non-campers: that's Barbara Stanwyck's real name), who frenetically acts out parts in half a dozen old movies, including "The Spiral Staircase," "The Ten Commandments," and "Madame X" ("the blondest movie ever made"). (Charles Ludlam Theatre, 1 Sheridan Sq. 691-2271.)

My Life as a Christian—Jaffe Cohen's autobiographical play about a Jewish boy's coming-of-age in the seventies. (Courtyard Theatre, 39 Grove St. 779-8447.)

The Naked Truth—Paul Rudnick's new comedy. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523. Closes July 3.)

101 Humiliating Stories—A tapestry of comic tales woven by Lisa Kron; directed by John Hoffman. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 302-6989. Closes July 2.)

Passion—Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's listless epistolary musical, in which the main characters spend much of their time singing love letters to and from each other. Jere Shere and Marin Mazzie are in fine voice as a dashing soldier and his lover, and Donna Murphy gives a stunning performance as Fosca, the predatory heroine. But much is verbalized and little is said—the words have no proper purchase on the audience's imagination—and there is an absence of pulse in Sondheim's workmanlike score. Lapine, who wrote the libretto, directed. (5/23/94) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Prince and the Pauper—A musical adaptation of Mark Twain's novel, written, composed, and directed by Elizabeth Swados. Presented here in a concert version. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 3.)

Sanctifying Grace—Colin Quinn's comedy about the Brooklyn Irish during the nineteen-seventies. Directed by Robert Moresco. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318. Closes July 16.)

Simply Cole Porter—A show combining familiar tunes and pieces written for movies that never made it to the screen. (Perry Street Theatre, 31 Perry St. 779-9777. Closes July 17.)

Stomp—A group of eight British rhythm specialists who use unconventional percussion instruments. The noise is terrific. (Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477.)

subUrbia—A new play by Eric Bogosian, with Tim Guinee, Josh Hamilton, Martha Plimpton, and Steve Zahn. Directed by Robert Falls. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

That's Life!—A musical revue about modern Jewish life. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

Three Tall Women—A moving, poetic play by Edward Albee, which is dominated by the huge, heroic performance of Myra Carter. Jordan Baker and the droll and delightful Marian Seldes are also in the cast. Directed by Lawrence Sacharow. (5/16/94) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

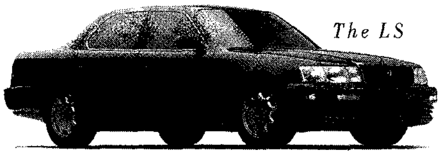
Wrath of Kali—A giant video screen is the backdrop for this play in which a Domino's pizza deliverer and sometime chanteuse, portrayed by Lucy Payjack, discovers, to her regret, that she is the incarnation of Kali, the Hindu goddess of creation and destruction. Typecast by a feminist film director in a movie about the battle between the sexes, Lucy is sent up against Darika, a male demon played by a video-channelled Orson Welles, who adds a touch of evil to this otherwise tame work. Written by Leslie Mohn and directed by Lee Breuer and Ms. Mohn. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes July 3.)

LONG RUNS

ANGELS IN AMERICA: "Millennium Approaches" and "Perestroika." (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.) . . . **BLOOD BROTHERS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GUYS AND DOLLS:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Vanessa Williams takes over Chita Rivera's role starting on June 27. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.) . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W.

ROBERT DEMICHIELL

Some people say we're too obsessed with a .00038″ tolerance. (Or was it .00039″?)



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

45th St. 239-6200.... **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200.... **NUNSENSE:** *Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321....* **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.... **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.... **THE SISTERS ROSENSWEIG:** Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.... **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200.... **THE WHO'S TOMMY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

IN ANOTHER CATEGORY

RENO—The comedian and performance artist presents "Citizen Reno." (Westbeth Theatre Center Music Hall, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. June 22 at 10:30 and June 26 at 9.)

"CHARLES BUSCH'S DRESSING UP!"—Busch and other divas of drag, with a live band, in an evening of gorgeous gowns. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. June 24 at 8.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—The company concludes the season with performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. June 22-24 at 8, June 25 at 2 and 8, and June 26 at 1 and 7.)

ELIZABETH STREB RINGSIDE—A gymnastic dance company presenting, among other works, "Line" and "Bounce." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. June 22-25 at 8.)

PILAR RIOJA—The renowned flamenco dancer, presenting two New York premières and five other Spanish dances. (Gramercy Arts Theatre, 138 E. 27th St. 889-2850. June 22-25 and July 1-2 at 8, and June 26 and July 3 at 3. Through July 17.)

"PASSION AND GRACE"—A lesbian-and-gay dance celebration. June 22 at 8 and June 23 at 2: Companies from Canada, Haiti, Denmark, and Hawaii.... ¶ June 23-24 at 8: Solos and duets, including a new, improvisational work by Robert LaFosse and a première choreographed by Donald Byrd. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 799-4276.)

PILOBOLUS—The opening performances of a five-week engagement. June 27 at 8: "Collideoscope" (New York première), "Duet," "The Particle Zoo," "Empty Suitor," and "Sweet Purgatory."...¶ June 28, June 30, and July 2 at 8, and July 3 at 7:30: "The Particle Zoo," "Duet," "Quatre-jeux" (New York première), and "Rejoyce."...¶ June 29 and July 1 at 8 and July 2 at 2: "Collideoscope," "Empty Suitor," "Shizen," and "Day 2."... ¶ July 5 at 8: "Untitled," "Pseudopodia," "Animundi" (New York première), "Televisitation," and "Sweet Purgatory." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through July 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

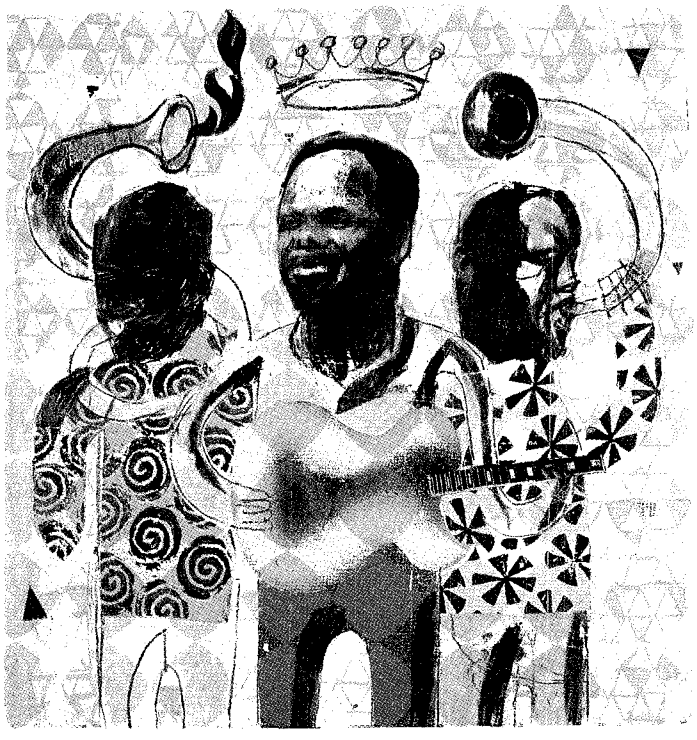
JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL—June 23 at 8 and June 24 at 8:30: Philadanco and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company.... ¶ June 25 at 8:30: A benefit performance, by the Mark Morris Dance Group (with cellist Yo-Yo Ma), Robert LaFosse, Margie Gillis, and others.... ¶ June 30 at 8 and July 1-2 at 8:30: Margaret Jenkins Dance Company.... ¶ July 1 at 8, July 2 at 5, and July 3 at 7: Contraband.... ¶ July 5 at 8: Mark Morris Dance Group. Through July 9. (Becket, Mass. 1-413 243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

Bright Blue Light

"YOU don't know what love is until you've learned the meaning of the blues," sang Dinah Washington. When Cassandra Wilson sings the same line on "Blue Light 'til Dawn," her ninth album, you hear again the sensuousness and conviction that made Washington such an authoritative bluesologist. The album is the most haunting and satisfying testament yet to Wilson's moody eclecticism, which incorporates jazz, folk, and R. & B. in a sultry, blues-saturated sound. Wilson's reach is remarkable: in addition to standards, she gives strong readings of songs by Robert Johnson, Van Morrison, and Joni Mitchell.

Wilson's voice conveys both provocative warmth and weariness, qualities that probably owe more to nature than nurture: the daughter of a jazz guitarist, she's blessed with the sort of ripe, resonant alto that doesn't depend on training or accompaniment. Still, she has always attracted formidable support. During her big-city apprenticeship in the early eighties, she sat in with pianist Ellis Marsalis in New Orleans and collaborated with saxophonist Steve Coleman in New York. On "Blue Light" the session players include cornettist Olu Dara and guitarist Chris Whitley, whose performances the producer, Craig Street, kept spare and insinuating. Wilson is also a hypnotic stage presence, and she'll be working her blue magic at the Bottom Line on June 29-30.



King Sunny Adé, at Central Park SummerStage and S.O.B.'s.

CARL DUNN

CONCERTS

JVC JAZZ FESTIVAL—Outside of the predictable headliners, the most enticing shows this year feature South American artists, and the worthiest music will be free. Plan on spending a lot of time in Bryant Park.... ¶ June 24 at 8: **MILTON NASCIMENTO** and **PACO DE LUCIA.** Nascimento is Brazil's gift to the world—a marvellous composer, haunting singer, and charismatic performer. Paco DeLucia's guitar work blends lightning virtuosity with gypsy passion. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)...At 8: **MEL TORMÉ** and **PATTI AUSTIN.** (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)... ¶ June 25 at 8: **GEORGE SHEARING** and **CLEO LAINE.** (Carnegie Hall.)... At 8: **DAVE BRUBECK** and **SLIDE HAMPTON.** (Avery Fisher Hall.)... ¶ *June 26 at 2: An eclectic afternoon under the sun featuring* **ROY HAYNES, RASHIED ALI,** and **STEVE GROSSMAN. LARRY GOLDING'S** trio and **RUSSELL MALONE** are also on the bill. Bring your shades. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. No tickets necessary.)... ¶ June 27 at 2: The **JAVON JACKSON** quartet, the **KEVIN HAYES** quintet, and others. (Damrosch Park. No tickets necessary.)... At 8: **DICK HYMAN,** solo, duo, and trio. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824.)... ¶ June 28 at 4: The Fifth Annual International Association of Schools of Jazz will present performances by students and teachers from more than seventeen countries. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. No tickets necessary.)...At 8: The mighty **CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ BAND** battles the dynamic **LINCOLN CENTER JAZZ ORCHESTRA.** (Avery Fisher Hall.)... ¶ June 29 at 4: Columbia Records throws itself a party; thankfully, their jazz roster is looking good these days. **TERENCE BLANCHARD, JAMES (BLOOD) ULMER,** and **DAVID SANCHEZ** will perform. (Bryant Park. No tickets necessary.)... At 8: Bebop will be spoken when pianists **ROLAND HANNA** and **BARRY HARRIS** go head to head; a funky organ throwdown follows with **SHIRLEY SCOTT** and **JIMMY MC GRIFF.** (Town Hall.)... ¶ June 29-30 at 8: The great **RAY CHARLES** and **TOWER OF POWER.** (Avery Fisher Hall.)...¶ June 30 at 4: The best show of the whole festival is as free as a stroll. The **MINGUS BIG BAND,** the **CHICO FREEMAN** quintet, the **JAY HOGGARD** band, and the trios of two terrific young pianists, **CYRUS CHESTNUT** and **JACKY TERRASSON.** (Bryant Park.)...At 8: **BILLY TAYLOR.** (Carnegie Hall.)... ¶ July 1 at 4: A very promising (and very free) presentation, featuring **THE DUKE'S MEN,** the **GEORGE GRUNTZ** concert jazz band (with **RAY ANDERSON**), the **JULIUS HEMPHILL** sextet, the **THOMAS CHAPIN** trio, and the **WALLACE RONEY** quintet. (Bryant Park.)... At 8: A tribute to John Garcia Gensel, pastor to the jazz community, who retired this year from his post at St. Peter's Church. The lineup of cross-generational talent—including **BOBBY SHORT, DOC CHEATHAM, GERRY MULLIGAN, WALLACE RONEY, HILTON RUIZ,** and **JAMES WILLIAMS**—is testament to Gensel's influence. (Carnegie Hall.)... At 8: **GILBERTO GIL** and **CAETANO VELOSO.** Superstars in Brazil, Gil and Veloso are generous and persuasive singers whose vocal gifts are matched by their ability to draw upon the world's music and make it all sound universal. (Avery Fisher Hall.)... ¶ July 2 at 8: **TITO PUENTE** and **EDDIE PALMIERI.** (Carnegie Hall.)...At 8: **DAVID SANBORN** and **RONNY JORDAN.** (Avery Fisher Hall.)

KING SUNNY ADÉ AND THE NEW AFRICAN BEATS—Juju music may not have overtaken reggae, but Nigeria's King Sunny Adé, its greatest practitioner, grooves on. A semiologist would have a field day taking apart just a few of the components of Adé's sound: cross-talking African drums, burbling synthesizers, incantatory vocals, and pedal-steel-guitar

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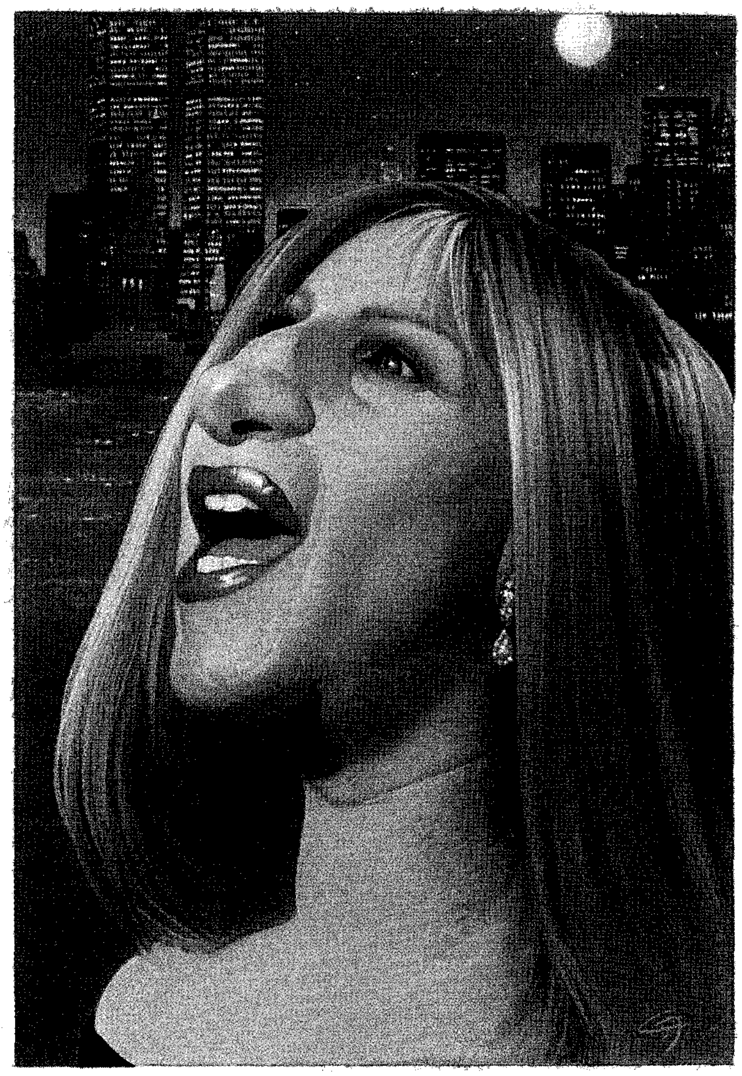


Barbra Streisand at Madison Square Garden.

C.F. PAYNE

work unlike anything heard on the Nashville Network. His latest album, "Live at the Hollywood Palace," is a fine testament to the hip-swaying commotion Adé and his sixteen Beats inspire. This music is designed to make you move. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 26 at 3. No tickets necessary.)

Barbra Streisand—The colossal, the enormous, the huge, the mammoth, the monumental, the prodigious, the stupendous Barbra lands on the top of the heap in her own home town. Her singing has mutated far beyond the uninhibited, jazzy syncopation of her early cabaret work—a wildness that also turned up in her early movie acting—but the pristine and unruffled perfection of her later diva style has its own freedom and authority. She may be a voraciously self-reflective performer, but her fans clearly find something generous and moving in the quality of her narcissism (and in the insecurity that shadows it). Who doesn't secretly want to be as bighearted and oceanic as Barbra's voice? She's flooded by the pent-up demand and bathed in adoration everywhere she goes, but Noo Yawk will be something special. With Marvin Hamlisch conducting a sixty-four-piece orchestra. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 23, June 26, June 28, and June 30, all at 8.)

Slide Hampton and the JazzMasters—It looks like brilliant trombonist/composer/arranger Hampton is finally getting the visibility he's always deserved. (He's also at the JVC Jazz Festival on June 25.) Hampton knows how to make a band sing, while his own playing has taken on even greater distinction. With the Dennis Mitcheltree quintet. (Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St., Brooklyn. June 29 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes—World Financial Center Plaza, Battery Park City. June 22 at 8. No tickets necessary.

Youssou N'Dour—Manhattan Center Ballroom, 311 W. 34th St. June 23 at 9. For tickets, call 307-7171.

Moody Blues—With the Long Island Philharmonic. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. June 24 at 8.)

Queen Ida / Beau Jocque—An afternoon of high-powered zydeco. (Central Park SummerStage. June 25 at 3. No tickets necessary.)

Patti LaBelle—With After 7 and Frankie Beverly & Maze. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 25 at 6:30.)

Phil Collins—Meadowlands Arena. 1-201 935-3900. June 25-26 at 8. . . . ¶ Jones Beach Theatre. July 2-3 at 8. 1-516 221-1000.

Janet Jackson—With M.C. Lyte. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. June 27-28 at 8.)

Indigo Girls—Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. June 28-29 at 8.

"The Southern Spirit Tour"—Featuring the Marshall Tucker Band, .38 Special, the Outlaws, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, and the Barefoot Servants. (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. June 29 at 7:30.)

K. C. and the Sunshine Band—World Financial Center Plaza, Battery Park City. June 29 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.

Gipsy Kings—Central Park SummerStage. July 1 at 7:30. For tickets, call 307-7171.

Booker T. and the MG's / Fugees (Tranzlator Crew)—Central Park SummerStage. July 2 at 3. No tickets necessary.

Diane Schuur—With the Roberta Piket quartet. (Prospect Park Band Shell. July 2 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

The Mighty Sparrow / Ajala—Central Park SummerStage. July 3 at 3. No tickets necessary.

War / Wild Magnolias—Central Park SummerStage. July 4 at 3. No tickets necessary.

CLUBS

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—June 24: An evening of Irish mouth-organ music, with **mike berry, don meade,** and **alex tobias.**

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—**blue rodeo** is here on June 23, with **spirit of the west.** On June 24-25: **john gorka,** with Dar Williams. Sensuous R. & B. singer **cassandra wilson** works her blue magic on June 29-30.

Café Sin-é, 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—Ireland's **frames dc** plays straight-ahead rock and roll on June 23.

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—**velocity girl** offers bracingly melodic alternative pop on June 24. On June 25, you can check out **d generation.**

Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—The **lady bunny** continues her extended run.

Grand, 76 E. 13th St. (777-0600)—**sugartooth** stops by on June 29, with Q-South. Monday nights, the Grand hosts Soul Kitchen, an evening of seventies R. & B. for devotees of Don Cornelius.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—The club's Stonewall celebration continues, with **phranc** (June 22), **lea delaria** (June 23-24), and **betty** (June 25). On June 28: **sheryl crow,** with the **devlins.** Last year, after a distinguished career as a top-flight backup singer, Sheryl Crow released "Tuesday Night Music Club," a strong, smart, sexy solo début that finally let Crow's longtime admirers in the L.A. music community—and folk-rock fans at large—hear her roar. Last year also brought the Devlins' first album, "Drift," a collection of tautly atmospheric, superbly crafted pop songs that never got the push it deserved. Fortunately, "Drift" has just been rereleased. **yellowman** plays on June 29, with guests Papa Jube & the Jubilation Band. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday night, at the Continental Club. The dancers all share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Limelight, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—On June 27: **primal scream.** This Scottish band boasts some hip influences, from the seminal psychedelia of the late-sixties Beatles to the seminal punk of the Velvet Underground, but not much in the way of distinction or innovation. Wednesday night is Disco 2000.

Manny's Car Wash, 1558 Third Ave., at 87th St. (369-2583)—The **voodudes** perform on June 28. On July 4, catch the Jon Paris Band.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken. (1-201 798-4064)—**velocity girl** swings by on June 23, en route to its CB's gig. On July 1-2, **luna** serves up spacey prog-rock.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—June 26: **god is my co-pilot. steve wynn** is here on June 28, with House of Freaks. Wynn fronted the L.A.-based Dream Syndicate in the early eighties, and is a sometime member of the endearingly scrappy rock outfit Gutterball. At heart, though, he's a folkie singer-songwriter in the best post-Dylan tradition, and his new solo album, "Fluorescent," brims with haunting songs and gritty, glowing arrangements. June 29: Catch **joy askew.**

Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, 495 Second Ave., at 28th St. (686-1210)—**black 47** usually plays on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and Speir Mor (Gaelic for Big Sky) performs for a hearty following on Fridays. Séisiún—a traditional Irish jam—is on Thursday nights.

Thread Waxing Space, 476 Broadway. (966-9520)—June 23: An evening of Brazilian percussion, pocket trumpet, and guitar, with **nana vasconcelos, don cherry,** and Living Colour's **vernon reid.** June 26: A benefit for Global Children's Organization, which sponsors summer camps for refugee children from the Balkans, featuring **ween, freedy**

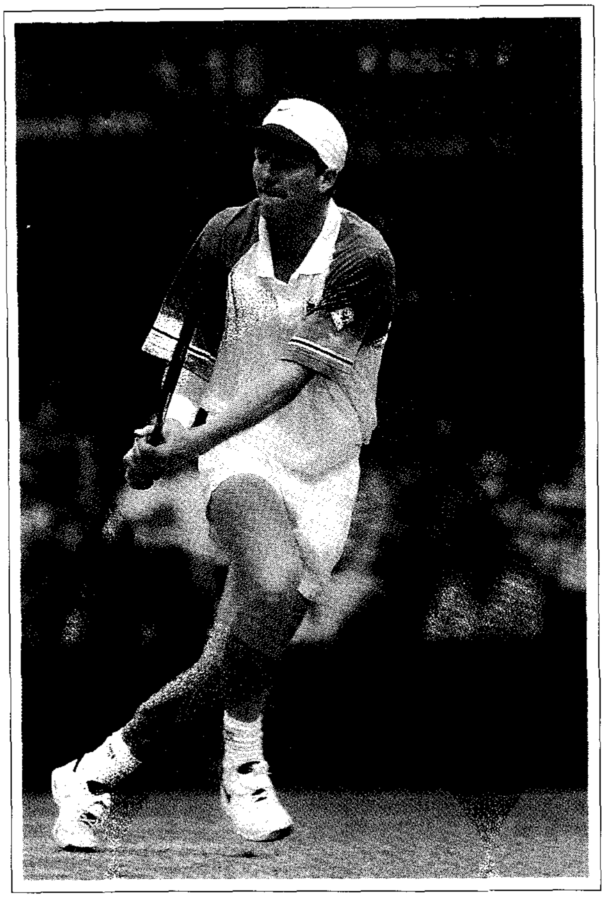
Rolex and Wimbledon: a tradition of excellence.

In 1869, the All England Croquet Club established itself on four rented acres in Wimbledon. By 1875, the club had set aside a rectangle of grass for lawn tennis, which was growing in popularity. Two years later, the club had changed its name to the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club.

That same year, some 200 spectators watched as 22 amateur players competed for a silver cup, which was awarded to Spencer Gore, the first Wimbledon champion.

Today that legendary lawn, renamed the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in 1889, has expanded to 42 acres with 18 championship grass courts, each holding revered memories. And none is more storied than Centre Court.

Spencer Gore, the tournament's first champion.



Rolex and Jim Courier at Centre Court.

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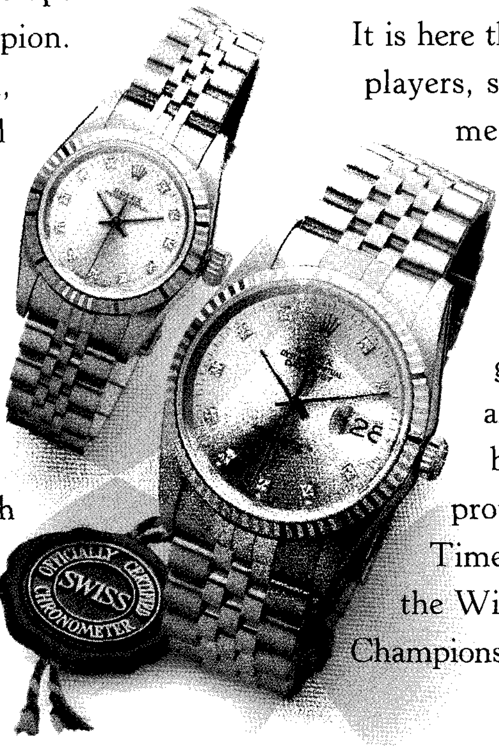

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JOHNSON, and American Music Club vocalist MARK EITZEL.

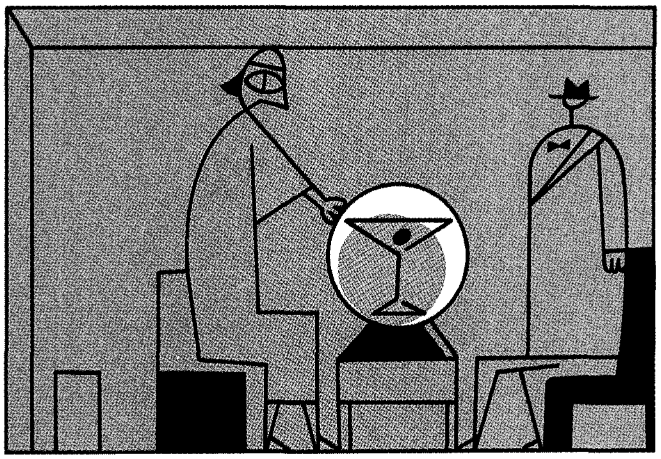
Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—The cool country rocker RODNEY CROWELL arrives on June 23, with Mike Henderson. June 25: A zydeco showdown, featuring BOOZOO CHAVIS and BEAU JOCQUE. July 1, catch BOOKER T. AND THE MG'S.

Sounds of Brazil, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—R. & B. crooners GERALD ALBRIGHT and LALAH HATHAWAY continue through June 23. KING SUNNY ADÉ makes a special appearance on June 28. VINX is here on June 29-30. Vinx's current album, "The Storyteller," is even quirkier and more eclectic than his two previous ones, setting the singer-percussionist's mellifluous baritone against a lush backdrop of jazz, salsa, and flamenco. Closed Sundays. Dining.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—On June 26: DISAPPEAR FEAR, with singer-songwriters TOSHI REAGON and RUTH GERSON. NEW POTATO CABOOSE rolls in on July 2.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Algonquin Round Table continues, with mother-daughter singing act BETTY JOHNSON and LYDIA GRAY in "A Family Affair," through July 2. Dining.



Birdland, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—The GARY BARTZ / LARRY WILLIS quartet plays on June 24-25. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—The BENNY CARTER quartet and the ROY HARGROVE quintet continue through June 26. It may seem unfair to place the eighty-six-year-old Carter on a bill with the twenty-four-year-old Hargrove. Carter's a living miracle; his imperishable alto saxophone work is as poised and sturdy as it was six decades ago, and his writing and arranging are still in their own class. A gutsy neo-bopper, Hargrove could stand a bit more finesse and imagination, but he's got enough heart to face this challenge.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—The ANDY BEY trio performs through June 25, followed by JOHN HICKS and DAVID WILLIAMS on June 27-July 2. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—BOBBY SHORT continues through June 25. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, BARBARA CARROLL presides at the piano, through June 25. Singer and pianist KURT WIETING follows, with a two-month engagement beginning June 27.

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—June 24-25: RONALD SHANNON JACKSON and the DECODING SOCIETY appear.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—Through June 26: the JOE MORELLO quartet. On Mondays, guitarist-inventor LES PAUL leads a trio. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—The ABRAHAM BURTON quartet appears on June 28-July 2. The saxophonist trained in drummer Art Taylor's bop boot camp. A bruising young player when the tempo is high, Burton can also caress a ballad when called upon to do so.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Brass rails, vintage posters, Hirschfeld drawings, and a piano. RUSS KASSOFF and LINC MILLIMAN are here through June 25.

Knitting Factory, 47 E. Houston St., near Mulberry St. (219-3055)—JOHN ZORN'S MASADA is in on June 23-24. June 27: The KLEZMATICS.

Le Madeleine, 403 W. 43rd St. (246-2993)—Sunday evenings belong to guitar great GENE BERTONCINI. Bertoncini is an inspired stylist with a vast repertoire at his fingertips. He effortlessly shifts gears from brooding, elegant standards to sputtering bebop, and his tone is creamier than pâté.

Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—On Mondays, Woody Allen continues his night job as clarinet player in the NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL AND RAGTIME ORCHESTRA, a Dixieland-jazz ensemble. The rest of the week VERNEL BAGNERIS salutes Jelly Roll Morton. Closed Sundays.

Metropolis, 31 Union Square W. (675-2300)—The basement of this swank café is now hosting a series of high-profile gigs. The CHRIS CONNOR quartet performs on June 24-25.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. (632-5000)—LESLEY GORE continues a four-week engagement, through July 16. The Brooklyn-born Gore was a teen-age singing, songwriting sensation before Debbie Gibson was even a glimmer in her stage mother's eye. But while sappy sixties relics like "It's My Party" could certainly be called pre-Gibsonesque, Gore also produced savvy smokers like "You Don't Own Me." As an adult, she has continued to hone her pop craft, and will present some of the results—along with a few old chestnuts—in this revue. Closed Mondays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—EDDIE GOMEZ AND NEXT FUTURE are here through June 26. On June 28-July 3: the PHILIP HARPER septet. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter MILES EVANS is in action on Mondays. Dining.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—ILLINOIS JACQUET completes a monthlong run on July 3. Jacquet's arrangements call to mind the rough-and-tumble charm of Count Basie and Lionel Hampton, both of whom he apprenticed with as a young man.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—The CECIL TAYLOR UNIT appears through June 26. On June 28 through July 3, catch the MULGREW MILLER trio. Miller is a product of Memphis, a town whose jazz pianists invariably fall under the looming shadow of the florid legend Phineas Newborn, Jr. Miller, who tested his mettle with Art Blakey in the eighties, can be loquacious; his solos tend toward the oratorical. The VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—On June 22, guitarist ATTILA ZOLLER teams up with pianist DON FRIEDMAN. Zoller and Friedman are in on a secret that only comes with experience: lyricism and form pack the same emotional punch as grandstanding, but with the former the impact lingers. The TED NASH quartet is here on June 29. Dining.

Zanzibar, 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—June 23: The EITHER/ORCHESTRA, a ten-piece big band that combine elements of Mingus, Monk, and Miles with an eye toward the future. June 24-25: Catch STUFF, featuring STEVE GADD and GORDON EDWARDS.

ART

Stella!

JOSEPH STELLA, who occupies a small but secure niche in the canon of twentieth-century American art, is the subject of a retrospective at the Whitney (through October 9). Stella is typically grouped with the Precisionists Sheeler and Demuth, or regarded as an American Futurist, a celebrant of the brash energies of industrialism and technological innovation. His signature image is the Brooklyn Bridge, which he painted repeatedly in the late teens and the twenties. It's often a surprisingly drab picture, coming from an acolyte of modernity—cramped in composition and rife with sooty shadows.

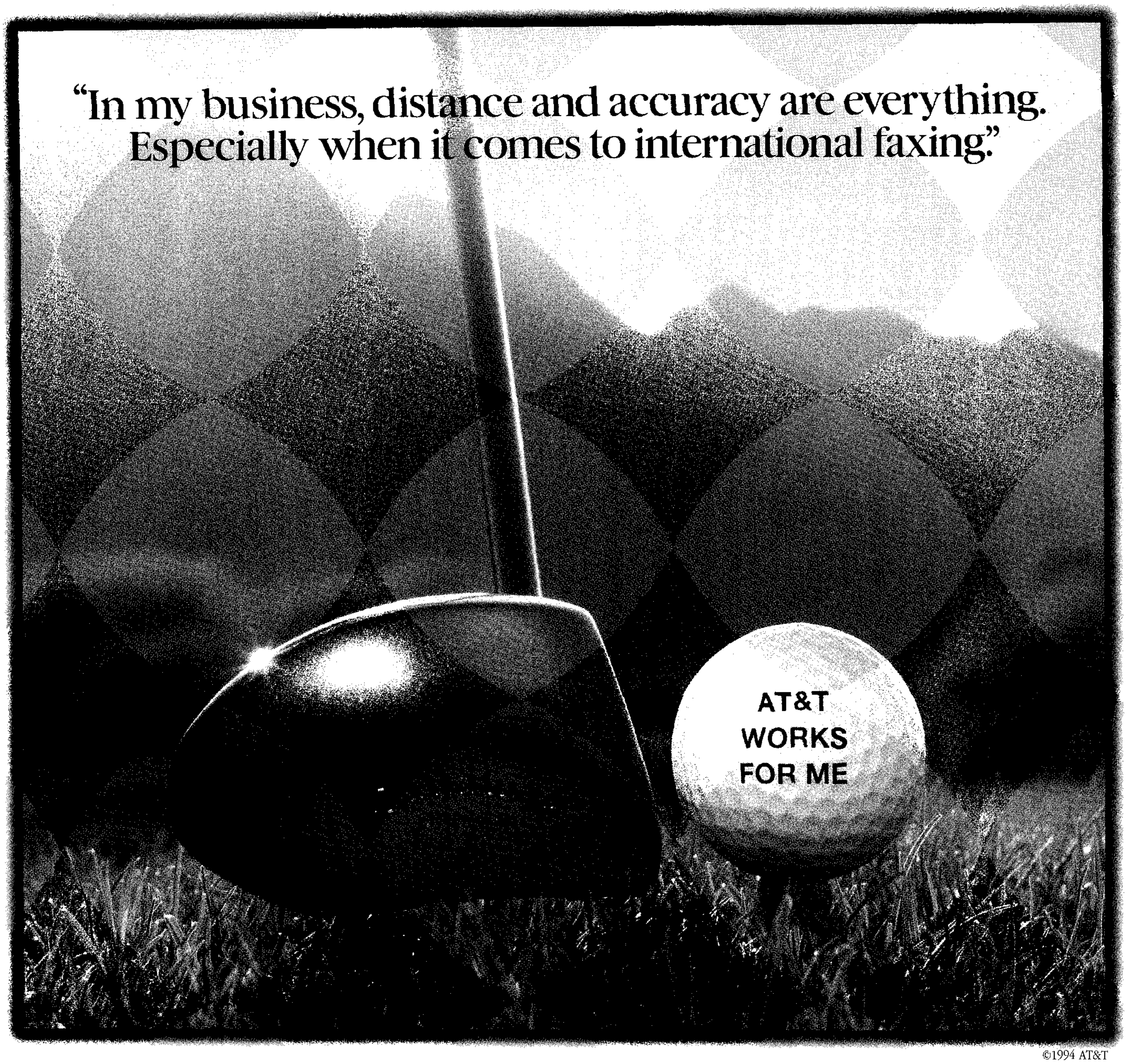
In fact, Stella was something of a latecomer to America, arriving from Naples in 1896, a few months before his nineteenth birthday. The Whitney has emphasized the immigrant experience in this retrospective; Stella is the perpetual outsider, stranded between the traditions of the old country and the amnesiac temper of the New World. The Brooklyn Bridge itself symbolized the transition between discordant realms of experience. "Brooklyn gave me a sense of liberation," Stella wrote in 1928. "The vast view of her sky, in opposition to the narrow one of *New York*, was a relief—and at night, in her solitude, I used to find, intact, the green freedom of my own self." The Whitney has provided a glimpse into several aspects of that self. While Stella was churning out modernist pictures, he was also creating some delirious, kitschy mystico-religious paintings, like "The Virgin" (1926) and "Purissima" (1927), which were icons of the life he left behind.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Dali: The Early Years." Also known as "Hello, Dali." Several paintings and drawings from the collection of the Spanish Surrealist (1904-89) who brought you melting watches. The earliest work predates Dali's student days in Madrid; the latest is from 1931. Opens June 28. . . . ¶ "Picasso and the Weeping Women: The Years of Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar." Some eighty paintings, drawings, sculptures, and prints. . . . ¶ "Petrus Christus: Renaissance Master of Bruges." Twenty-seven works by the Flemish painter—three-quarters of Petrus's known œuvre—in an exhibit that reconstructs his career as an artist of the first rank. Through July 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—British modernists' drawings from the museum's collection, including works by Vanessa Bell and David Hockney. Opens June 23. . . . ¶ "Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties." Polly Apfelbaum and Andrea Zittel are among the artists represented. . . . ¶ "Bernard Tschumi: Architecture and Event." Models and drawings of six projects. Part of the museum's Thresholds series. Through July 5. . . . ¶ "American Surrealist Photography" offers forty-nine photographs from the per-

I.D. KING



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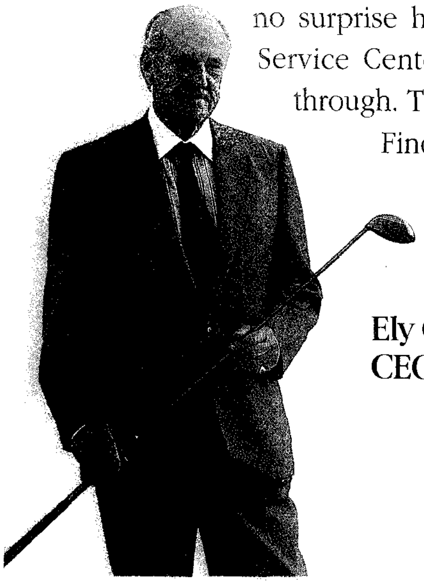

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manent collection. The truly surreal images really get to the heart of the matter; others seem to have been smuggled in from outside the supposed theme. Through July 5. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Oskar Kokoschka, Works on Paper: The Early Years, 1897-1917." . . . ¶ "The Tradition of the New: Post-War Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Collection." (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6, and Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway—"Rolywholyover A Circus." John Cage (1912-1992) took his title from Joyce's "Finnegans Wake" and used, among other things, a computerized version of the "I Ching" to create a circus. Cage said, "The basic idea is that the exhibition would change so much that if you came back a second time, you wouldn't recognize it." It includes a rotating exhibit of work by fifty artists, including Rauschenberg and Joseph Cornell; *enso* scrolls; an interactive computer installation; an object each from the permanent collections of several New York museums; and a media room with a program that is always changing. For schedule information, call 423-3836. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

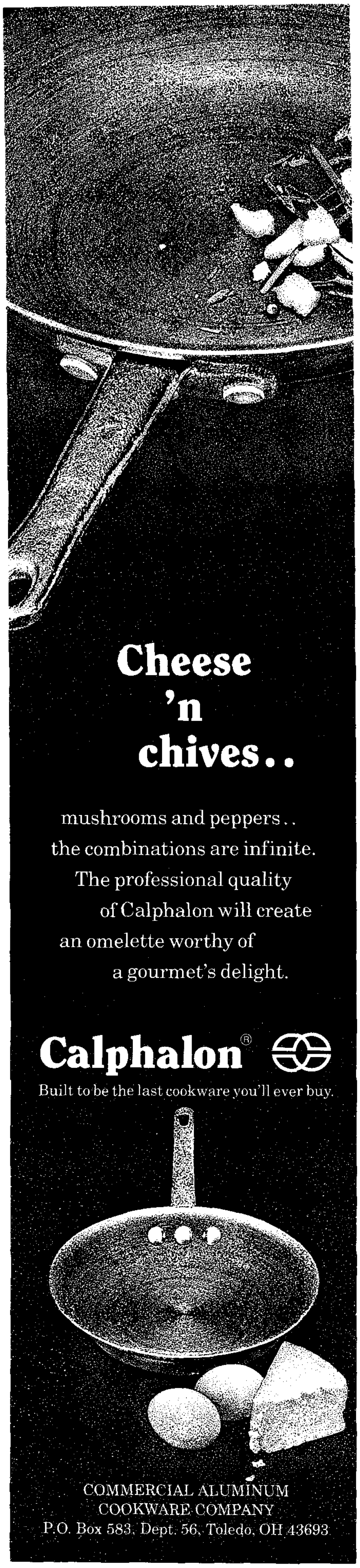
Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Edward Hopper and Jack Pierson: American Dreaming." As part of the Collection in Context series, Pierson paired some of his own work with paintings and works on paper by Hopper (1882-1967). Opens June 23. . . . ¶ A retrospective of more than two hundred paintings and works on paper by Joseph Stella (1877-1946). . . . ¶ "Richard Avedon: Evidence 1944-94." A retrospective that includes the photographer's early unpublished work for *Life*, fashion shots for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, several signature formal portraits, and a series of pictures done in the East Louisiana State Hospital, in February, 1963. Through June 26. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St.—"Royal Tombs of Sipán." Gold, silver, and gilded copper objects of the Moche, a pre-Inca civilization of northern Peru. Opens June 24. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993." An expanded version of the sculptor's 1993 Venice Biennale exhibit, with some twenty-five works made from Carrara marble, rubber, wood, bronze, steel, and glass. There are also thirty works on paper. Through July 31. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Alternative Museum, 594 Broadway—Sam Wiener and Evangeline Tabasco have created "Art Depot," a wicked satire on the culture of the museum shop, in which the ersatz shop has almost completely taken over the museum. The "exhibit," a suite of rusty minimalist sculptures attributed to one Dixie Sterroid, has been consigned to a tiny room at the rear, while the gallery itself is stacked high with toys and useless items based on famous art works: Brancusi-like pink flamingos for the lawn, a needlepoint kit based on a Jackson Pollock painting (called a "dripstitch"), a Botero bathroom scale, a packet of dirt to start your own Earth Room. And it's all for sale. Through June 25. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

American Craft Museum, 40 W. 53rd St.—"Bauhaus Workshops: 1919-33." Furniture, metalwork, glass, textiles, and ceramics made by disciples of the German school of architecture and design, including Mies van der Rohe, Joseph Albers, and Marianne Brandt. Opens June 30. . . . ¶ "Sculptural Concerns: Contemporary American Metalworking."



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Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian-American Art." The society's first exhibit of contemporary art includes paintings, sculptures, and photographs by twenty Asian-American artists. Through June 26. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—"Angles of Repose: A Garden Exhibition of Central Park Benches." A selection of benches from the Park, dating back to 1858. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History" chiefly uses documentary material—architectural models, designs, photographs, and video—to trace the development of these memorials in Europe, Israel, and the United States. The exhibit confronts us again and again with aesthetic choices—narrative versus abstraction, passionate immediacy versus austere recollection. Ultimately, this show proposes the memorial as a place for remembering rather than as a repository for memories. Through July 31. (Open Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 to 5:45; Tuesdays, 11 to 8.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—"New York Beauties: Quilts from the Empire State." For the museum's New York Quilt Project, Quilt Days were held in various counties to locate, document, and preserve quilts. Of the approximately six thousand examples obtained, twenty-two are on view, the most flamboyant of which is Elizabeth Hamilton's one-of-a-kind Teaching Quilt (1934). (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Pride=Power!" marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall rebellion, in which patrons of a gay bar resisted arrest and harassment, triggering a series of riots and demonstrations. The exhibit includes photographs of the New York City Gay and Lesbian Pride March, posters, pennants, T-shirts, and other artifacts. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Glancing Backward: Edith Wharton's New York." Paintings, drawings, sculpture, and books that detail the literary career of Edith Wharton. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

New Museum, 583 Broadway—"Huang Yong Ping: Chinese Hand Laundry and Chen Zhen: Field of Waste." Two installations for which the artists have divided the gallery into both shared space and individual territory, positioning their work according to the principles of Chinese chess. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, noon to 8.)

New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall." Photos, posters, and related material place the Stonewall rebellion in the larger context of gay history. . . . ¶ "Richard Long: Books, Prints, Printed Matter" is a display of the printed work of this British artist, who is known primarily for his sculpture. Through June 25. (Mondays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center—"Out in Public: Post-Stonewall Performance and Protest." Plays, cabarets, operas, and songs with gay themes chronicling the crossover between protest and theatre. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, noon to 8; Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, noon to 6.)

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ART-Cont'd

Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th St.—"The 25th Anniversary Exhibition: Selected Works from the Permanent Collection, Part II." Works on paper. Through July 3. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. The following listings lead off with new shows.)

"Drawn in the 1970s"—Works on paper by Richard Artschwager, Allen Ruppersbury, Richard Tuttle, and others. Opens June 23. Through Aug. 12. (Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St. Closed Saturdays.)

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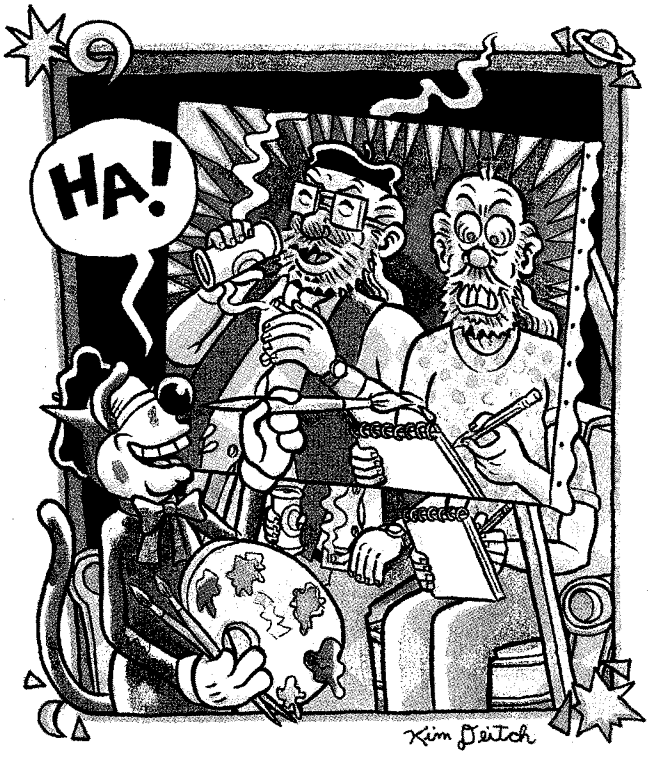

Self-portrait by Kim Deitch, at right, with his brother Simon. (Four Color Images).

Kim and Simon Deitch—Some seventy original pencil sketches, layouts, inked pages, and hand-colored prints from a comic-book series about the Mishkin brothers—a cartoonist and an executive working in the early days of the animation industry—whose lives revolve around the cartoon star Waldo the Cat. Waldo is "the major neurotic obsession" of the talented but tortured brother Ted, who conjures the demonic cat during alcohol-induced hallucinations. For this show, Kim Deitch, a star of the sixties underground-comics movement, has "re-created" murals done by Ted while in a sanitarium and cels from early animated Waldo cartoons. Through July 30. (Four Color Images, 524 Broadway. Open Mondays.)

Alan Rath / Robin Tewes—Robotic mixed-medium sculptures, often incorporating video images of staring eyes and grimacing mouths. "Super Wallflower" (1994), a sprawling wall piece, consists of pulsing audio speakers and a bizarre bouquet suggesting a techno "Little Shop of Horrors." / In the project room is a series of small, bright, deliberately bland paintings, rendered in the deadpan Surrealist style associated with Magritte. All is not well in suburbia, and apparently the psychopathology of everyday life dies hard. Through June 25. (Weber, 142 Greene St.)

Jason Simon—"Album," a conceptual installation addressing the intersection of personal imagery and the technologies of mass consumption. Simon took pictures using cameras and film types of the fifties and sixties, and framed them in promotional mounts used by Polaroid salesmen, who took pictures of passersby in department stores; each photo bears the legend "A Polaroid Land picture—finished in 60 seconds." Simon's "instant," faux-vintage pictures also recapitulate the styles and themes of several twentieth-century masters; one detects elements of Edward Weston, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Garry Winogrand, and Alfred Stieglitz, among others. Through June 25. (Hearn, 39 Wooster St.)

Diamonds—What could be more appropriate on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall riot than an exhibition devoted to the archeology of drag? The objects in the show constitute a time-capsule history of gay New York: photographs of the drag queens who started the riot; a "ruby"-encrusted necklace and cigarette holder belonging to Mme. Ekathrina Sobechanskaya, foundress of the Trockadero ballet troupe; a Jackie Curtis shopping bag, only slightly crumpled; a superbly tacky tin headdress worn by Charles Ludlam in his play "Eunuchs of the Forbidden City"; a case of Ethyl Eichelberger's surrealistic theatrical costumes; a gaudy ring worn by Quentin Crisp as Lady Bracknell in a 1982 production of "The Importance of Being Earnest"; an Austrian crystal choker belonging to Supermodel of the World, RuPaul. The exhibition is amateurish, but aptly so, and—what other word will do?—fabulous. Through July 2. (Leslie-Lohman Gay Art Foundation, 127 Prince St.)

Toyce Anderson—Autobiographical mixed-medium assemblages. Through July 5. (Kelly, 591 Broadway.)

Michael Heizer—Several stone sculptures hang from massive steel cables, and rough-hewn boulders have been set into the walls and floor. There's no way the effect could be anything less than imposing, although the aura of conspicuous *folie de grandeur* leaves a question as to whether that effect is one of art or of ostentatious interior decoration. Through Aug. 15. (Ace, 275 Hudson St., at Spring St. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 6.)

Bruce Nauman and H. C. Westermann (1922-81)—Drawings revealing Westermann's influence on Nauman. Through July 15. (Markey, 55 Vandam St. Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 2.)

Julian Schnabel—Large abstract paintings on sailcloth, dedicated to the French film actress Jane Birkin. Through Sept. 9. (Pace, 142 Greene St.)

Richard Serra—"Weight and Measure" (1994), a series of large-scale paint-stick-on-hiromi-paper drawings that were executed with the specific spatial dimensions of the gallery in mind. Serra, the master of monumental sculpture (remember "Tilted Arc"?), manages to endow the typically fragile medium of drawing with an almost geological heft. Through July 30. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St.)

Mathew Weaver—Small, bright-colored paintings. Through July 2. (Engelhorn, 470 Broome St.)

Rob Wynne—A double exhibition. In the Washington Square windows of Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 33 Washington Pl.: Thrift-shop clothing stitched with poetry and love letters, and mounted on hangers. Through July 22. . . . ¶ At Wimmer, 560 Broadway: Silk-screened wallpaper in a pattern of intertwining snakes covers the gallery walls. Through July 7.

"A Bouquet for Juan"—A tribute to Juan Gonzalez (1942-93), an artist who used realist techniques to render dream imagery. Works by Don Eddy, Frances Gillespie, Toby Kahn, and others who knew the artist. Through July 1. (Hoffman, 429 West Broadway.)

"A Floor in a Building in Brooklyn"—A show curated by Chuck Close that explores the work of eight artists sharing a floor in a Greenpoint factory building. Through July 30. (Anderson, 476 Broome St.)

"Stonewall"—Works by thirty gay and lesbian artists dealing with the first quarter century of gay liberation. Through July 23. (White Columns, 154 Christopher St. Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Jacob Kainen—Forty abstract paintings, from 1934 to 1992. (Equitable, Seventh Ave. at 51st St. Opens Saturdays at noon.)

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On Paper—A carefully chosen show of works by four artists—Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Alfonso Ossorio, and Anne Ryan—paying tribute to the work of Douglass Morse Howell, a great papermaker. Pollock was an ardent fan of Howell's; he used his thick, handmade paper to great effect, allowing the dripped inks to bleed into its lush, absorbent surface. (The show also includes a copy of the "Serenity Prayer," printed by Howell and given to Pollock, who hung it on his studio wall.) Krasner's works in gouache, full of tendrils and splotches, have an anthropomorphic feel and Ossorio's works, with their primal subjects—masks, cracks, fissures—and earth tones, seem seared, as if his images had been burned into the paper. But the show really pays homage to Anne Ryan, exhibiting ten of her patchwork collages in fabrics and Howell paper. They are perfect arrangements of different weaves and colors, whether dainty and pale or stark and surreal. Through July 22. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Willem de Kooning—Paintings and drawings from the fifties through the eighties. Through Aug. 12. (C & M, 45 E. 78th St. Closed Saturdays.)

Donald Lipski—An array of small wall-mounted sculptures (circa 1978-91) composed of such everyday objects as razor blades, scissors, rubber bands, and cigarettes. Over all, a mood of slightly tiresome whimsy prevails. Through July 29. (Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St.)

René Magritte (1898-1967)—"Le Domaine Enchanté," a suite of paintings from 1953, by the Belgian Surrealist. Through July 22. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Anniversary—A show in tribute to Otto Kallir (1894-1978), who founded the gallery in 1939. Included are paintings, drawings, and prints by Oskar Kokoschka, Morris Hirshfield, and Emil Nolde. Through Sept. 2. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. Closed Saturdays.)

"4 Women"—Gillie Holme, Jessica Weiss, Elizabeth Meyersohn, and Anne Connell. Through July 29. (Perspective Fine Arts, 19 E. 71st St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

"Sun and Sea: American Watercolors"—Elizabeth Bishop, Arthur Dove, John Marin, and others. Through July 28. (De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St.)

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PHOTOGRAPHY

The Unbroken Line

THE scope of photography—in particular, its capacity to record the historical instant while achieving lasting aesthetic value—is impressively displayed in "Appeal to This Age: Photography of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," which opens this week at Greenberg (120 Wooster Street; through July 30). The exhibition, which was organized by Steve Kasher, presents the work of forty-three photographers in all its multifaceted actuality, providing a kind of immersion experience: the visual, the political, and the social flow in and out of each other seamlessly.

Many of the images are so saturated with moral drama and significance that the issue of whether or not the photograph is "good" or "bad" seems almost absurd. Yet seeing Martin Luther King, Jr., being manhandled by policemen, or Mississippi policemen sharing tips on how to hit demonstrators with billy clubs, is not an accidental insight; it's the product of the sharp eye of the person who took the shot. A variety of photographers are represented: working news photographers, unaffiliated photographers (both white and black) who simply knew the significance of what they witnessed, and the ones who have now attained mythic status: W. Eugene Smith, Robert Frank, Richard Avedon, and Henri Cartier-Bresson. There are also several lesser-known photographers, like Charles Moore, whose pictures really stand out.

A number of these photographs have an archetypal power, resonating with images of our own day. The recent pictures of South Africans waiting to vote for the first time, standing in lines that coiled across the landscape like rivers, and the scenes in the streets of New York this week, as marchers and activists observe the anniversary of Stonewall, bring home the fact that the fight for equality is not a thing of the past.

TOUHAMI ENNADRE AND PAUL ROSIN—Photographs by a French-Moroccan photographer and an American photographer that explore sexuality, death, and the body. Through July 15. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway.)

BILL JACOBSON—A series of pale, haunting images that evoke the vulnerability of life in the age of AIDS. Through July 1. (Saul, 560 Broadway.)

THOMAS RUFF—Photographs of buildings designed by the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron. Through July 2. (Blumarts, 99 Wooster St.)

W. EUGENE SMITH—Images by a photographer best known for his photo-essays in *Life*. Through Aug. 19. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St.)

FRANK WARD—Recent black-and-white photographs of Tibet. Through Sept. 10. (O.K. Harris, 383 West Broadway.)

NEIL WINOKUR—Portraits of "people, things, and dogs." Through July 15. (Borden, 560 Broadway.)

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

All Together Now

MUSIC'S contribution to New York's summer sporting scene is the amateur sing-along. The events are widely called "summer sings," which is what the New York Choral Society dubbed them when it started its series thirty-four summers ago, although competitors have respectfully adopted knockoff names. One could become a sing-along junkie for much of the summer, spending Mondays at the West Village Chorale "Summer Sing" (at the Church of St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson Street, at Grove Street; call 570-7301 for information), Tuesdays and Thursdays at the New York Choral Society "Summer Sings" (CAMI Hall, 165 West 57th Street; 247-3878), and Wednesdays at the St. George's Choral Society "Summer Sing-Out" (St. George's Church, 209 East 16th Street; 460-0940).

It is understood that performances will reflect more enthusiasm than polish, but the pleasure is in the participation (sight-reading not being much of a spectator sport). All the series follow a similar format. Participants bring their own scores, or rent (or borrow) them at the door. The conductor of the week is drawn from a pool of usual suspects, all of them highly regarded leaders of the city's principal choruses (which leads to considerable directorial overlap among competing series). The repertoire tends toward the best-loved choral classics—Handel's "Messiah," Bach's Magnificat and B-Minor Mass, the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms, Verdi, and Fauré—but on June 27 the West Village Chorale will depart from the standards by offering a sing-along evening of Gregorian chant, an unusual opportunity for folks swept up in the current mania for monody.

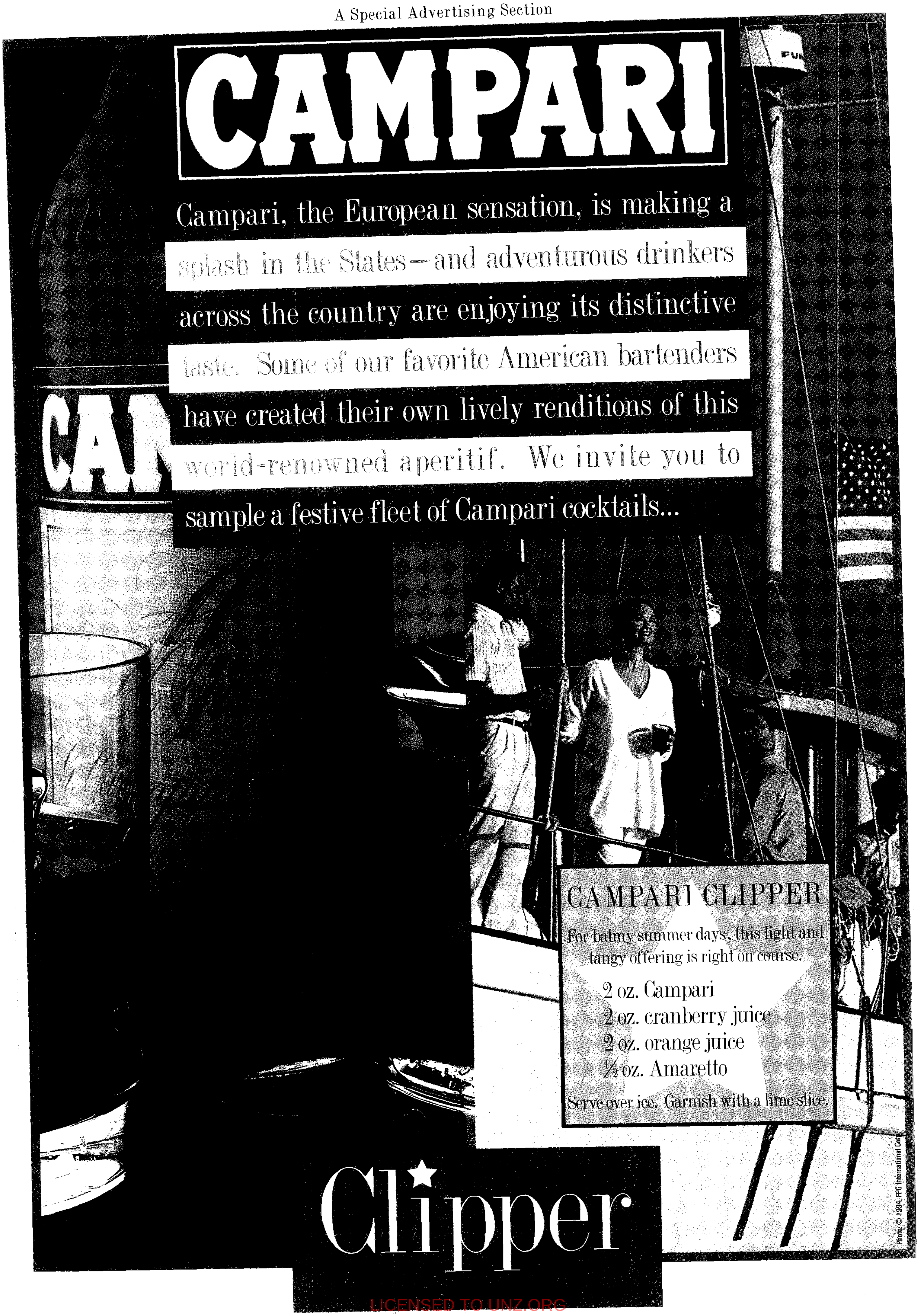
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—Presenting free, outdoor concert performances. June 22: "Tosca," with Diana Soviero and Lando Bartolini; conducted by Thomas Fulton. (Brookdale Park, Montclair, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 24: "Lucia di Lammermoor," with Young Ok Shin, Ramon Vargas, Haijing Fu, and Paul Plishka; Edoardo Müller. (Buccleuch Park, New Brunswick, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 25: "Tosca," with Diana Soviero and Lando Bartolini; Thomas Fulton. (Cooper River Park, Pennsauken, N.J.) (Evenings at 8. For rain-date information, call 212-362-6000.)

OPERA MANHATTAN—Presenting Handel's "Amadigi," in Italian (with English supertitles), with Gabriel Guimarães conducting his reduced orchestration. (June 22 and June 24 at 8. Church of the Resurrection, 115 E. 74th St. For information about tickets, call 315-3161.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

ST. MICHAEL'S CHOIR AND THE ARTEK ENSEMBLE—Robert Barrows directs Bach's Magnificat, Cantata No. 50, A-Major Mass, and A-Minor Triple Concerto. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University; enter at Broadway and



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Clipper

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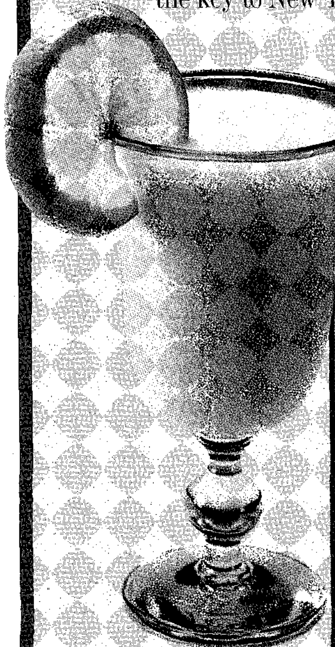

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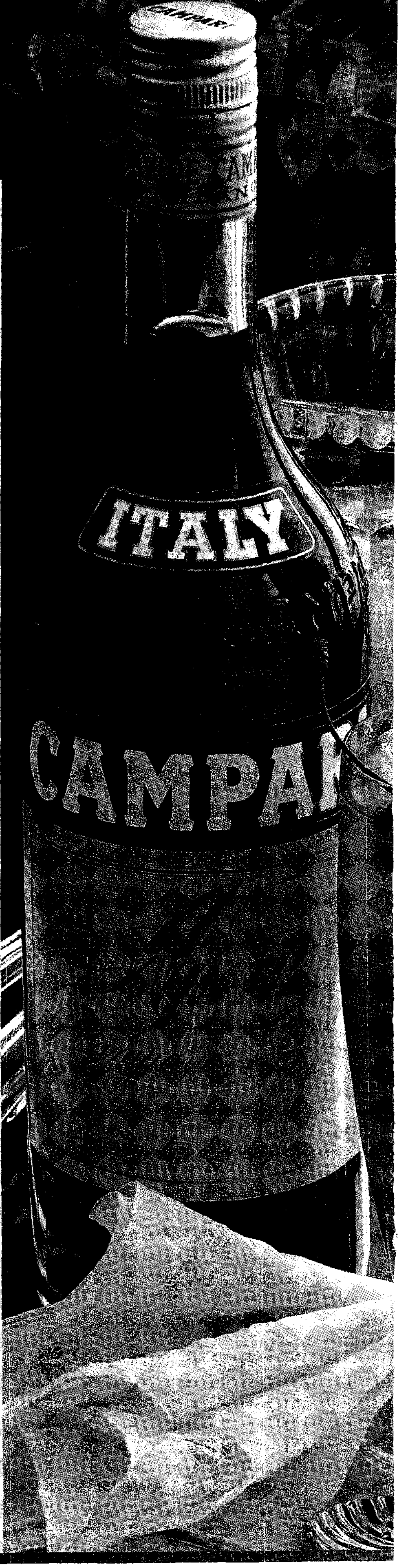

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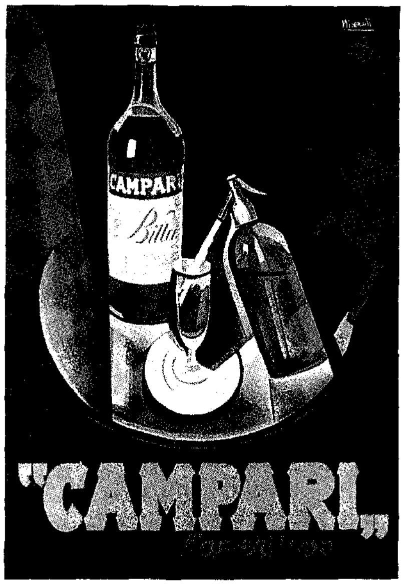

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CLASSICAL MUSIC-Cont'd

116th St. June 22 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

Bach Aria Festival—The Long Island festival visits New York with a program that includes Telemann's "Water Music" as well as Bach's "Coffee" Cantata (with soprano Beverly Hoch and baritone James Maddalena), B-Minor Orchestral Suite (with flutist Samuel Baron), and Cantata No. 156. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. June 22 at 8. Admission by contribution.)

New York City Gay Men's Chorus—Gary Miller directs a pair of concerts, sharing the bill with the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles (directed by Jon Bailey) and the Seattle Men's Chorus (directed by Dennis Coleman). June 22 at 8: With an extra set from the Angelenos. . . . ¶ June 23 at 8: With an extra set from the Seattleites. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

Lesbian and Gay Bands and Choruses—Instrumentalists and singers from all over, in a program that includes Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" (with pianist James Adler) and excerpts from Bernstein's "West Side Story." (Paramount, Madison Square Garden. 465-6741. June 23 at 8.)

Outdoor Choruses—Free concerts in Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park, weather permitting. June 23 at 7: The New York Vocal Arts Ensemble. . . . ¶ June 30 at 7: The Gregg Smith Singers. . . . ¶ July 5 at 7:30: The National Chorale, in a Broadway program.

I Cantori di New York—Mark Shapiro directing. (Alice Tully Hall. June 28 at 8. No tickets necessary. Admission on a first-come, first-served basis.)

Washington Square Music Festival Orchestra—Stephen D'Agostino conducts Mozart's D-Major Divertimento (K. 136) and Oboe Concerto (with Henry Schuman) and Haydn's Symphony No. 68. (Washington Square Park. June 28 at 8. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the concert will be held at New York University's Loeb Student Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl.)

Summergarden 1994—Opening concerts of the Museum of Modern Art's annual outdoor festival, which this year features music from the first three decades of the twentieth century. Joel Sachs conducts a chamber orchestra of Juilliard students in American orchestral classics: Ruggles' "Portals," Cowell's "Sinfonietta," Copland's "Music for the Theatre," and Ives' Symphony No. 3 ("The Camp Meeting"). (Sculpture Garden, Museum of Modern Art, 14 W. 54th St. July 1-2 at 8:30. No tickets necessary.)

Goldman Band—Gene Young conducting. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. July 3 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

Bronx Arts Ensemble Jazz and Dixieland Band—Music by George M. Cohan and others. (Woodlawn Cemetery, Jerome Ave. and Bainbridge Ave., the Bronx. July 4 at 2. No tickets necessary.)

Mostly Mozart—In the opening concert of the season (which runs through Aug. 20), Gerard Schwarz conducts the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra in Brahms' "Variations on a Theme by Haydn," Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" Overture, and Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 4 ("Mozartiana"), as well as arias by Haydn, Gluck, and Mozart (with baritone Thomas Hampson) and Chopin's "Variations on 'Là Ci Darem la Mano' " (featuring pianist Shura Cherkassky). (Avery Fisher Hall. July 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic—June 23 at 7:30 and June 26 at 4: Violist Hsin-Yun Huang and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott perform Schumann's "Märchenbilder"; Ms. McDermott assists clarinettist Michele Zukovsky in Poulenc's Clarinet Sonata; and all join for works by Bruch and Mozart (his "Kegelstatt" Trio). . . . ¶ June 30 at 6 (a candlelit dinner concert) and July 3 at 4: A transposition for viola of Bach's Fifth Cello Suite, as well as Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major and Dvořák's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major; with violinist Ik-Hwan Bae, violist Nokuthula Ngwenyama, cellist Christopher Costanza, and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061.)

Andrew Bolotowsky and Rebecca Pechefsky—The flutist and the harpsichordist play works by J. S. Bach, his sons (C.P.E., J.C.F., and J.C.), and his students (Johann Ludwig Krebs and Johann Gottfried Müthel). (Spring Studio, 64 Spring St. June 25 at 10. Admission by contribution.)

Island Music—Sunday-morning mostly Baroque concerts way uptown in the Bronx's maritime community. June 26 at 11:30 A.M.: Flutist Emanuel Davis and harpsichordist Dong-sok Shin play works by Handel, Benda, and Jean-Marie Leclair. . . . ¶ July 3 at 11:30 A.M.: The City Island Baroque Ensemble performs Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. Admission is free, but call 1-718 885-2478 to reserve a seat.)

Ambrosia Trio—Performing piano trios by Haydn, Germaine Tailleferre, and Smetana. (Cornerstone Center, 178 Bennett Ave., at 189th St. June 26 at 3. Admission by contribution.)

Salon Soirées—Intimate concerts in a second-floor music room. June 26 at 6 and 8: Clarinettist Miriam Lockhard, cellist Maria Kitsopoulos, and pianist Ilan Rechtman perform trios by Beethoven and Glinka. . . . ¶ July 3 at 6 and 8: Trumpeter Alex Holton plays sonatas by the Italian Baroque composer Carlo Tessarini. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. Admission is free, but call 876-6000 to reserve a seat.)

Luminary Victorians—Opening concerts of a series focussing on nineteenth-century musical superstars. June 28 at 6:30: Songs and piano works by Liszt, featuring tenor Anthony Bellov and pianist Esther Lee Kaplan. . . . ¶ July 5 at 6:30: Repertoire associated with Jenny Lind, featuring soprano Jennifer Jordan and actor Seth Hamilton. (Abigail Adams Smith Museum, 421 E. 61st St. 838-6878. Through July 12.)

Claudia Dumschat—Organist, performing an all-Bach recital: the Preludes and Fugues in A Minor and E-Flat Major (the "St. Anne"), the G-Minor Fantasia and Fugue, the D-Minor Toccata and Fugue (the "Dorian"), and a selection of chorale preludes. (St. Michael's Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. June 29 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

Plucky Pair—Classical guitarist Dusan Bogdanovic and harpsichordist Elaine Comparone play Bach (original works and arrangements), plus works by Mr. Bogdanovic. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. June 29 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

Bach Aria Festival—Final events of this year's festival. At the Staller Center for the Arts, Stony Brook, Long Island: A family-oriented concert, with Gary Hodges conducting the Eroica Youth Symphony in works by Telemann and Bach, plus a Vivaldi violin concerto (featuring seven-year-old violinist Christine Ahn). (June 23 at 7.) . . . Vocal and instrumental chamber music by Telemann, Bach, and Couperin. (June 24 at 8:30.) . . . Samuel Baron leads the Bach Aria Group and the Festival Orchestra and Chorus in choral and instrumental works that illuminate diverse aspects of Bach's spiritual outlook. (June 25 at 8:30.) . . . ¶ At Chelsea Center, East Norwich, Long Island: An afternoon-long "Bachanalia" on June 26, with the Bach Aria Group and the Festival Orchestra and Chorus. At 2: The "Coffee" Cantata and Third "Brandenburg" Concerto, among other works. . . . At 5: The ricercar from "A Musical Offering," the B-Minor Orchestral Suite (with Mr. Baron), and excerpts from cantatas. (For informa-

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Cape May Music Festival—Final concerts of the season. June 22: Pianist Ursula Oppens performs sonatas by Stravinsky and Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 54); tango-inspired works by Piazzolla, Bolcom, Babbitt, and Nancarrow; and Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales" and "La Valse."... ¶ June 23: The American Piano Trio performs Ravel's Trio and Bloch's "Three Nocturnes."... ¶ June 26: The duo-piano team of Markham and Broadway offers a program of four-hand works by Schubert (including his F-Minor Fantasie), Stravinsky, and Liszt. (Evenings at 8:30. Congress Hall Hotel, Cape May, N.J. For information about tickets, call 1-609 884-5404.)

Opera Festival of New Jersey—"La Bohème," with Cal Stewart Kellogg conducting. (June 24 and July 2 at 8, and June 26 at 3.)... ¶ "The Barber of Seville," with Louis Salemno conducting. (June 25 and June 30 at 8, and July 3 at 3.) (Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J. 1-609 936-1500. All performances are in English.)

Music Mountain—June 25 at 8: The Mark Templeton jazz quartet.... ¶ June 26 at 3: The Shanghai String Quartet performs quartets by Debussy, Zhou Long (his "Song of the Ch'in"), and Turina ("La Oración del Torero"); Ruth Laredo assists them in Franck's Piano Quintet.... ¶ July 3 at 3: The Miami String Quartet plays Tchaikovsky's D-Major Quartet; the Cavani String Quartet plays Schumann's A-Minor Quartet; and both join for Shostakovich's Two Pieces for String Octet. (Falls Village, Conn. For information about tickets, call 1-203 824-7126.)

Caramoor Music Festival—Opening concerts of the season, which will run through Aug. 21. June 25 at 8:30: André Previn conducts the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Mozart's "Le Nozze di Figaro" Overture, Violin Concerto No. 3 (with Gil Shaham), and Symphony No. 40.... ¶ June 26 at 5:30: Messrs. Previn and Shaham are joined by violinist Eunice Lee, violist Paul Neubauer, and cellist Daniel Gaisford in a program that comprises Brahms' Second Violin Sonata, Beethoven's "Archduke" Trio, and Mozart's G-Major String Quartet (K. 387).... ¶ July 1 at 8:30: Members of the Mozartean Players (a period-instrument piano trio) perform Mozart's A-Major Violin Sonata (K. 526) and Divertimento in B-Flat Major (K. 254), Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 1, and Haydn's G-Major Trio (the "Gypsy Rondo").... ¶ July 2 at 8:30: Slide Hampton and the JazzMasters, featuring tenor saxophonist Jimmy Heath.... ¶ July 3 at 5:30: Pianist Ivan Moravec performs Beethoven's "Thirty-two Variations in C Minor" (WoO 80), Debussy's "Feux d'Artifice" and "Estampes," Janáček's "In the Mists," and several works by Chopin (including his First and Third Ballades).... ¶ July 4 at 5:30: The Great American Main Street Band. (Katonah, N.Y. 1-914 232-1252.)

Maverick Concerts—Opening concerts of the series' Beethoven-rich seventy-ninth season, which will run through Aug. 28. June 26 at 3: The Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio plays Beethoven's Trios in E-Flat Major (Op. 1, No. 1), C Minor (Op. 1, No. 3), and B-Flat Major (Op. 97, the "Archduke").... ¶ July 3 at 3: The St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, pianist David Korevaar, and tenor John Aler in a program comprising Beethoven's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major (Op. 16), String Quintet (Op. 29), and a selection of his Scottish Songs (Op. 108), in addition to some vocal works by Donizetti. (Woodstock, N.Y. 1-914 679-8217.)

Norfolk Chamber Music Festival—Opening concerts of the season, which runs through Aug. 20. June 30-July 1: Four up-and-coming string quartets—the Ying, the St. Lawrence, the Amernet, and the Fone—team up to offer Bartók's six quartets.... ¶ July 2: The Tokyo String Quartet plays quartets by Haydn (in G Minor, Op. 74, No. 3), Berg, and Beethoven (in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2). (Evenings at 8:30. Route 44, Norfolk, Conn. 1-203 542-3000.)

FOR KIDS

(A list of activities for children and their parents or other adults.)

SummerFair—Fortune-tellers, rides, an obstacle course, clowns, and mimes all share the waterfront at the plaza of the World Financial Center on June 25, from 10 to 6, and June 26, from noon to 5. (Battery Park City. No tickets necessary.)

Planting Pleasures—Create your own herb garden in the Children's Corner of the New York Botanical Garden. (Bronx Park. 1-718 817-8700. June 25-26 at 1.)

Last Hurrah—Bring lawn chairs, blankets, and picnics to the Great Outdoors Sundown Finale music-and-dance extravaganza. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. June 26 at 5. No tickets necessary.)

Jazz Babies—An introduction to the history and legends of jazz, for kids ages nine to thirteen, in the historic Morris-Jumel mansion and its environs. (Jumel Terrace at W. 160th St. 923-8008. July 1 at 1.)

Independence Day—The Children's Museum of Manhattan hosts several celebratory events on July 4, including patriotic speechmaking (at 11:30, 2:30, and 4), a workshop for creating personal symbols of freedom (at 1), and a treasure hunt in the stamp exhibit (at 2 and 4). (212 W. 83rd St. 721-1234.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Swingcraft—Dance under the stars at Lincoln Center, when Midsummer Night Swing starts up on June 22. Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks will kick off the series with a swing tribute to Fred and Ginger. Dancing begins at 8:15, on Wednesdays through Saturdays, through July 23. Left-footed? There's a lesson at 6:30 every night except Saturday.... ¶ Lincoln Center turns over its plaza to hundreds of artisans, who will display pottery, stained glass, and other crafts, in the 18th Annual American Crafts Festival. Demonstrations of bootmaking and woodworking will also be featured. (July 2-3, from noon to 9. No tickets necessary.)

Hotheads & Disappearing Rabbits—The annual Buskers Fare, from June 28-July 4, transforms lower Manhattan into a medieval marketplace. You'll find fire-eaters, madrigal singers, a rock-and-roll puppet band, jugglers, magicians, and the inevitable mimes. (For schedule information, call 321-2875.)

Fins On Parade—The people at Coney Island USA, sponsors of the Mermaid Parade, like to think of the annual marine event as the "largest art parade in the world," but this isn't just culture. In addition to the mermaids and mermen, octopuses, and possibly even sushi, there will be marching bands and antique cars. The parade gathers at Steeplechase Park and moves to the boardwalk via Surf Ave. on June 25, beginning at 2. (For more information, call 1-718 372-5159.)

Speed: The Game—Garry Kasparov, Judit Polgar, and fourteen other grand masters, including Joel Benjamin, from Brooklyn, will compete in the Intel World Chess Grand Prix, a speed-chess tournament. (Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, Eleventh Ave. between 34th and 39th Sts. June 27-30 at 11 and 4. For more information, call 1-800 388-5464.)

If It Feels Good—Step right up! Join the tattooed man, the man who eats glass, and other circus-sideshow denizens, musicians, and street performers for the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's "Pleasure Club" Carnival, on June 29, from 5 to 9. (For more information, call 431-0233.)

Red, White, & Blue—July 2-3: The Stars & Stripes Regatta draws some hundred sailboats to New York Harbor for the annual two-race, twelve-to-fifteen-mile event, which begins both days at 11. (South Street Seaport, Pier 16, East River at Fulton St. For more information, call 1-516 843-2169.)... ¶ July 4, from 9:20-9:50: Tuneful fireworks. WPLJ-FM 95.5 will broadcast a program synchronized with "A Salute to the Spirit of Unity," a show of fireworks exploding over the East River. The best view in Manhattan is on the East Side, between 14th and 42nd Sts.

Gay Pride Week—Two marches are planned for the morning of June 26. The official **Stonewall 25 March** will leave 42nd St. and First Ave. starting at 11, and will move up First Ave., turn west at 57th St., and proceed north

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on Sixth Ave., to Central Park. The marchers will congregate on the Great Lawn (mid-Park at 81st St.), where a rally will take place from 1 to 7. For more information, call 626-6925. . . . Although ACT UP apparently will not receive a parade permit, the group is organizing an AIDS protest march, which will move north from Sheridan Square, at Christopher St. and Seventh Ave., at 10. The route had not been announced by press time, but the marchers intend to join the Stonewall 25 March at Central Park South. For more information, call 774-4270. . . . CLOSING CEREMONIES—The Gay Games IV will close with a procession of athletes; performances by Aretha Franklin and Patti LaBelle, among others; and speeches by Ian McKellen, Kathy Najimy, and others. (Yankee Stadium. June 25 at 7:30. For tickets, call 307-7171.) . . . In "IAN MC KELLEN: A KNIGHT OUT AT THE LYCEUM," Sir Ian performs his one-man show about being a gay man and actor. (Lyceum Theatre, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200. June 22 at 7:30, June 24 at 8, and June 25 at 2.) . . . STONEWALL: NIGHT VARIATIONS—En Garde Arts presents the stories of nine characters who were at the Stonewall Inn on June 27, 1969. (Pier 25, West St. between Chambers and Laight Sts. June 18-July 17 at 8:30. For tickets, call 779-9777.)

WORDS ON THE WATER—The "Sounds at Sunset" reading series finishes out its season. June 23 and June 30 at 6: The final installments of Laurie Colwin's "Happy All the Time," read by Linda Lavin and Barbara Feldon, among others. . . . ¶ June 28 at 6:30: Martín Espada, Marie Howe, and Michael Weaver will read from their own poetry. (Battery Park City's Hudson River Park. No tickets necessary.)

READINGS—June 23 at 6: Edna O'Brien will read from her new novel, "House of Splendid Isolation." (Tisch Hall, New York University, 40 W. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 28 at 7: Jonathan Baumbach will read from his new novel, "Seven Wives: A Romance." (Limbo, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 29 at 7: Actors will read fiction from the pages of this magazine. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.)

WALKS—June 25 at 10: The New York Transit Museum will lead a tour of the Gowanus Canal, once one of the busiest waterways in the United States. For more information, call 1-718 330-5839. . . . ¶ June 25 at 8:30: Gaze at the stars with the Urban Park Rangers. Meet on Central Park West at 81st St. Binoculars are recommended.

SPORTS

(The Yankees play at Yankee Stadium, 1-718 293-6000, and the Mets at Shea Stadium, 1-718 507-8499. World Cup Soccer is at Giants Stadium, the Meadowlands. For tickets, call 1-800 769-1994.)

HOME TEAMS

YANKEES—Vs. the Minnesota Twins, June 22 at 1:05. . . . ¶ Vs. the Seattle Mariners, July 1 at 7:05 and July 2-3 at 1:35. . . . ¶ Vs. the Oakland Athletics, July 4 at 1:05 and July 5 at 7:05.

METS—Vs. the Pittsburgh Pirates, June 24 at 7:40, June 25 at 7:10 (Fireworks Night Spectacular), and June 26 at 1:40. . . . ¶ Vs. the St. Louis Cardinals, June 27-28 at 7:40 and June 29 at 1:40.

CHAMPIONSHIP BASKETBALL

ROCKETS GLARE—As of press time, the Houston Rockets were beating the Knicks, 2-1, in the fight for the N.B.A. Championship.

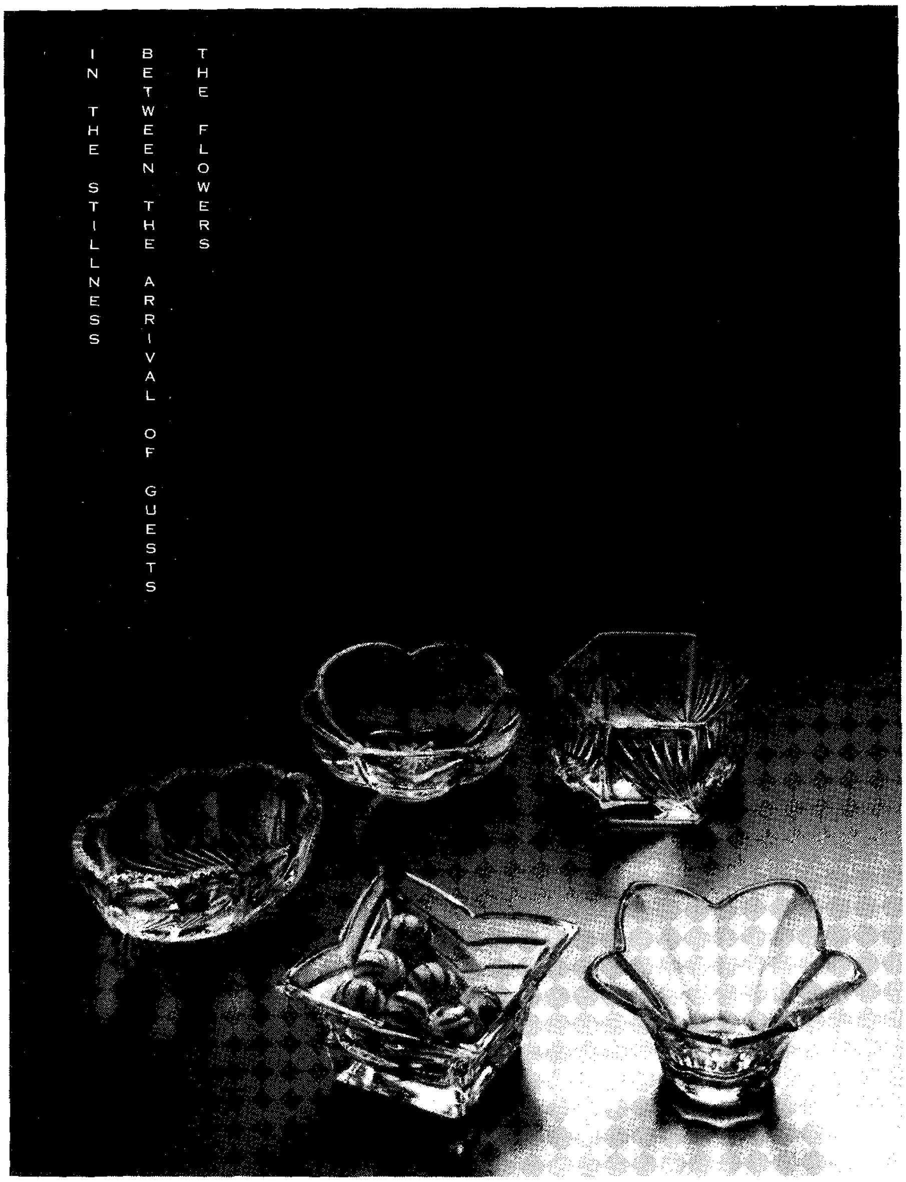
WORLD CUP SOCCER

FIRST ROUND GAMES—Italy vs. Norway, June 23 at 4. . . . ¶ Saudi Arabia vs. Morocco, June 25 at 12:30. . . . ¶ Ireland vs. Norway, June 28 at 12:30.

ROUND OF 16—Winners of first-round matches will compete against each other on July 5 at 4:30.

GAY GAMES IV

For complete schedule information, call 633-9494. For tickets, call 307-7171.



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THE MOVIES

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5				

FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A DAGGER ARE DESCRIBED IN "MOVIES IN BRIEF," STARTING ON PAGE 36.

EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000)
Theatre 1: "Grief" (directed by Richard Glatzer).
Theatre 2: "Go Fish" (†).
Theatre 3: "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues" (†).
Theatre 4: "Kika" (Pedro Almodóvar, in Spanish).
Theatre 5: "My Life's in Turnaround" (Eric Schaeffer and Donal Lardner Ward).
Theatre 6: "Little Buddha" (Bernardo Bertolucci).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)
Through June 23: "Jack Be Nimble" (Garth Maxwell), with Alexis Arquette.
From June 24: A program of Italian films.

Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th. (477-6600)
Theatre 1: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).
Theatre 2: "High Heels" (1991, Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish).
Theatre 3: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).

Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th. (982-0400)
Theatre 1: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas).
Theatre 2: Through June 23: "Widows' Peak" (John Irvin). From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).
Theatre 3: "Wolf" (Mike Nichols).
Theatre 4: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 5: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
Theatre 6: Through June 28: "Wolf." From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).
Theatre 7: "Wolf."

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th. (924-3363)
"Babyfever" (Henry Jaglom).

Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th. (529-6799)
Theatre 1: "Belle Époque" (Fernando Trueba, in Spanish).
Theatre 2: "Bruce Brown's The Endless Summer II" (†) and "Fear of a Black Hat" (†).
Theatre 3: Through June 28: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 29: "Woodstock" (†).
Theatre 4: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau; a Mexican film, in Spanish).
Theatre 5: Through June 23: "Cows" (Julio Medem; in Spanish). From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).
Theatre 6: Through June 28: "Schindler's List" (Steven Spielberg). From June 29: "Woodstock" (†).
Theatre 7: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).

19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th. (260-8000)
Theatre 1: "Four Weddings and a Funeral" (Mike Newell).
Theatre 2: Through June 23: "Wolf" (Mike Nichols), with Jack Nicholson and Michelle Pfeiffer. From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).
Theatre 3: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis).
Theatre 4: Through June 28: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).
Theatre 5: "Wolf."
Theatre 6: Through June 23: "Wolf." From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).

Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th. (689-6548)
Theatre 1: Through June 23: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).
Theatre 2: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 3: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).
Theatre 4: "The Flintstones" (†).

34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th. (532-5544)
Theatre 1: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 30: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis). From July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).
Theatre 3: "Wolf" (Mike Nichols).

34th St. East, 241 E. 34th. (683-0255)
"City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).

Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th. (755-3020)
"Kika" (Pedro Almodóvar, in Spanish).

Sutton 1 and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th. (759-1411)
Theatre 1: Through June 23: "Sirens" (John Duigan). From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 23: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).

Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th. (759-2262)
"Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).

Plaza, 42 E. 58th. (355-3320)
"Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould" (François Girard).

Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (935-6420)
Theatre 1: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas).
Theatre 2: "Naked in New York" (Dan Algrant).

59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th. (759-4630)
"Schindler's List" (Steven Spielberg).

Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th. (355-1663)
Theatre 1: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 2: "Speed" (†).

Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th. (753-6022)
Theatre 1: "Little Buddha" (Bernardo Bertolucci).
Theatre 2: "Bruce Brown's The Endless Summer II" (†).
Theatre 3: "Fear of a Black Hat" (†).

First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd. (752-4600)
Theatre 1: "The Flintstones" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 28: "The Flintstones" (†). From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).
Theatre 3: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
Theatre 4: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).
Theatre 5: Through June 30: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†). From July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).
Theatre 6: Through June 30: "Getting Even with Dad" (†). From July 1: "Baby's Day Out" (Patrick Read Johnson).

Gemini 1 and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th. (832-1670)
Theatre 1: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 2: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau; a Mexican film, in Spanish).

Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th. (737-2622)
"Wolf" (Mike Nichols).

New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th. (744-7339)
Theatre 1: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis).
Theatre 2: "Four Weddings and a Funeral" (Mike Newell).

68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th. (734-0302)
"Even Cowgirls Get the Blues" (†).

Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st. (879-1313)
Through June 23: "With Honors" (Alek Keshishian).
From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).

East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th. (249-5100)
Through June 30: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas), with Brandon Lee.
Through July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).

Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th. (534-1880)
Theatre 1: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 30: "The Flintstones" (†). From July 1: "Baby's Day Out" (Patrick Read Johnson).

Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (876-2400)
Theatre 1: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 2: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 3: "Wolf" (Mike Nichols).
Theatre 4: Through June 23: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis). From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).
Theatre 5: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 6: Through June 28: "Wolf." From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).
Theatre 7: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).

86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th. (249-1144)
Theatre 1: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).
Theatre 2: Through June 23: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
Theatre 1: "Freedom on My Mind" (directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford).
Theatre 2: See listings under Revival Houses.
Theatre 3: "The Boys of St. Vincent" (†).

Waverly 1 and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd. (929-8037)
Theatre 1: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 2: "Speed" (†).

Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th. (929-3350)
Theatre 1: "The Flintstones" (†).
Theatre 2: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis).

Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th. (255-8800)
Theatre 1: "Sirens" (John Duigan).
Theatre 2: "Bitter Moon" (Roman Polanski).
Theatre 3: Through June 23: "The Blue Kite" (Tian Zhuangzhuang, in Mandarin). From June 24: "Thieves Quartet" (Joe Chappelle).
Theatre 4: "Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould" (François Girard).

Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd. (691-4744)
Theatre 1: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).
Theatre 2: "The Flintstones" (†).
Theatre 3: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 4: Through June 30: "The Flintstones" (†). Through July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).
Theatre 5: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 6: Through June 30: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†). From July 1: "Baby's Day Out" (Patrick Read Johnson).
Theatre 7: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 8: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).
Theatre 9: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).

23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd. (989-0060)
Theatre 1: "Crooklyn" (Spike Lee).
Theatre 2: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas), with Brandon Lee.
Theatre 3: "Sankofa" (Haile Gerima).

Guild, 33 W. 50th. (757-2406)
Through June 28: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
From June 29: "I Love Trouble" (Charles Shyer).

Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th. (247-4777)
Through June 23: "The Lion King" (†).

Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between 8th and 9th Aves. (246-1583)
Theatre 1: "Six Degrees of Separation" (Fred Schepisi).
Theatre 2: "The Paper" (Ron Howard).
Theatre 3: "Jurassic Park" (Steven Spielberg).
Theatre 4: "The Piano" (Jane Campion).
Theatre 5: "In the Name of the Father" (Jim Sheridan).
Theatre 6: "Philadelphia" (Jonathan Demme).

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MOVIE HOUSES–Cont'd

Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th. (765-7600)
"Wolf" (Mike Nichols).

Festival, 6 W. 57th. (307-7856)
"Schindler's List" (Steven Spielberg).

57th St. Playhouse, 110 W. 57th. (581-7360)
"Sirens" (John Duigan).

Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th. (265-2520)
Theatre 1: "Go Fish" (†).
Theatre 2: "Like Water for Chocolate" (Alfonso Arau; a Mexican film, in Spanish).

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th. (586-1900)
"My Life's in Turnaround" (Eric Schaeffer and Donal Lardner Ward).

Paris, 4 W. 58th. (980-5656)
"Widows' Peak" (John Irvin).

Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th. (752-5959)
"The House of the Spirits" (Bille August).

Columbus Circle, B'way at 61st. (247-5070)
"Four Weddings and a Funeral" (Mike Newell).

62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd. (265-7466)
"The Flintstones" (†).

Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd. (757-2280)
Theatre 1: "Little Buddha" (Bernardo Bertolucci).
Theatre 2: "White" (†).
Theatre 3: "Kika" (Pedro Almodóvar, in Spanish).
Theatre 4: "The Slingshot" (†).
Theatre 5: Through June 30: "Red Rock West" (John Dahl). From July 1: "A Place in the World" (Adolfo Aristarain; in Spanish).
Theatre 6: "Belle Époque" (Fernando Trueba, in Spanish).

Regency, B'way at 67th. (724-3700)
"Speed" (†).

84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th. (877-3600)
Theatre 1: Through June 30: "Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis). Through July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).
Theatre 2: "Wolf" (Mike Nichols).
Theatre 3: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
Theatre 4: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 5: Through June 23: "Wolf." From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).
Theatre 6: Through June 23: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall). From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).

Thalia, B'way at 95th. (316-4962)
"Naked in New York" (Dan Algrant).

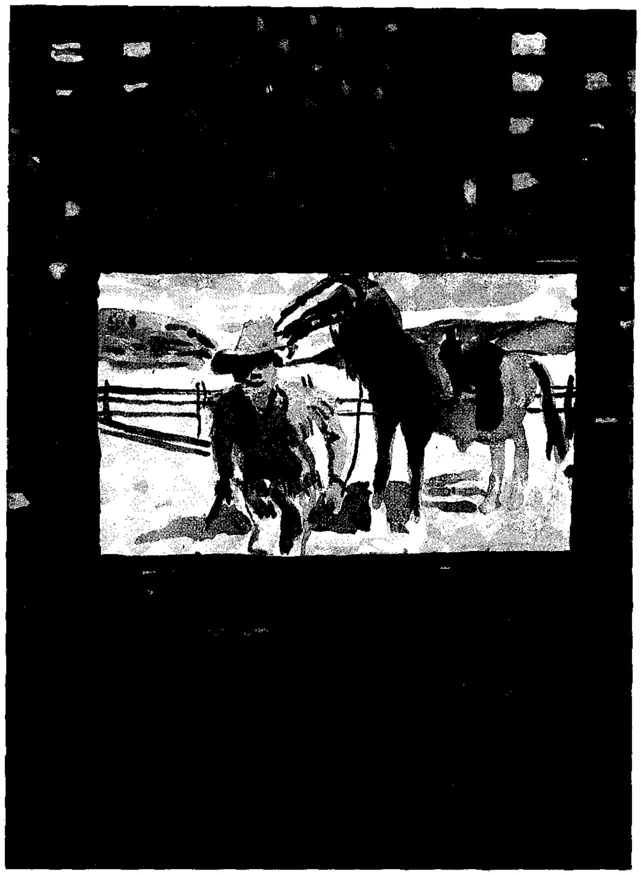
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th. (222-1200)
Theatre 1: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 28: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).

Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th. (865-8128)
Theatre 1: "Crooklyn" (Spike Lee).
Theatre 2: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th. (354-0900)
Theatre 1: "Getting Even with Dad" (†).
Theatre 2: Through June 23: "Getting Even with Dad" (†). From June 24: "Wyatt Earp" (Lawrence Kasdan).
Theatre 3: "Maverick" (†).
Theatre 4: Through June 30: "No Escape" (Martin Campbell). Through July 1: "Blown Away" (Stephen Hopkins).
Theatre 5: Through June 30: "The Cowboy Way" (Gregg Champion). From July 1: "Baby's Day Out" (Patrick Read Johnson).
Theatre 6: "Speed" (†).
Theatre 7: Through June 30: "Speed" (†). Through July 1: "Blown Away."

Embassy 1, B'way at 46th. (302-0494)
Through June 23: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).
From June 24: "The Lion King" (†).



Alan Ladd in "Shane," at Bryant Park.

MAX MILLER

Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th. (730-7262)
Theatre 1: Through June 28: "The Crow" (Alex Proyas), with Brandon Lee. From June 29: "City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold" (†).
Theatre 2: "The Crow."
Theatre 3: Through June 23: "When a Man Loves a Woman" (Luis Mandoki). From June 24: "Renaissance Man" (Penny Marshall).

Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way. (869-8340)
"Beverly Hills Cop III" (John Landis).

National Twin, B'way at 44th. (869-0950)
Theatre 1: Through June 28: "Crooklyn" (Spike Lee). From June 29: "Little Big League" (Andrew Scheinman).
Theatre 2: "The Flintstones" (†).

REVIVAL HOUSES

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)
June 22: "The Unforgiven" (1960, directed by John Huston).
June 23-26: "The Searchers" (1956, John Ford) and "Broken Arrow" (†).
June 27: "The Vanishing American" (1925, George B. Seitz; silent) and "The Silent Enemy" (1930, H. P. Carver; silent).
June 28: "A Man Called Horse" (1970, Elliot Silverstein) and "Black Robe" (Bruce Beresford).
June 29: "The Outlaw Josey Wales" (1976, Clint Eastwood).
June 30: "Call Her Savage" (1932, John Francis Dillon) and "End of the Trail" (1933, J. R. Lederman).
From July 1: "The Conformist" (1970, Bernardo Bertolucci; in Italian).

Theatre 80 St. Marks, 80 St. Marks Pl. (254-7400)
June 22: "Cabaret" (1972, Bob Fosse) and "I Am a Camera" (1955, Henry Cornelius).
June 23: "Colonel Redl" (1985, István Szabó; in German) and "Veronika Voss" (1982, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German).
June 24-25: "Play It Again, Sam" (1972, Herbert Ross) and "Broadway Danny Rose" (1984, Allen).
June 26: "Forbidden Games" (†); and "Gervaise" (1956, René Clément; in French).
June 27: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish) and "The Magician" (1958, Bergman; in Swedish).
June 28: "Vertigo" (1958, Alfred Hitchcock) and "Frenzy" (1972, Hitchcock).
June 29: "Letter from an Unknown Woman" (1948, Max Ophuls), and "Caught" (1948, Ophuls).
June 30: "Play Misty for Me" (1971, Clint Eastwood) and "Joe Kidd" (1972, John Sturges).
July 1-2: "Taxi Driver" (1976, Martin Scorsese) and "Raging Bull" (1980, Scorsese).
July 3: "Laura" (1944, Otto Preminger) and "Night and the City" (1950, Jules Dassin).
July 4: "Viridiana" (1961, Luis Buñuel; in Spanish) and "This Strange Passion" ("El"; 1952, Buñuel; a Mexican film, in Spanish).
July 5: "Two for the Road" (1967, Stanley Donen) and "How to Steal a Million" (1966, William Wyler).

FILM LIBRARIES, ETC.

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through July 12: A program of gay and lesbian films. . . . ¶ June 23 at 2:30: "Splendor in the Grass" (1961, Elia Kazan). . . . ¶ June 23 at 6: A program of short films about New York City. . . . ¶ June 23 at 8: "Do the Right Thing" (1989, Spike Lee). . . . ¶ June 24 at 3: "Raging Bull" (1980, Martin Scorsese). . . . ¶ From June 24, a series of films from M-G-M studios.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level. (875-5600)—A program of films from Ireland.

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria. (1-718 784-0077)—A program of films by cinematographer John Alton.

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—June 22 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "Jacquot" (1993, Agnès Varda; in French). . . . ¶ June 29 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "Becoming Colette" (1992, Danny Huston).

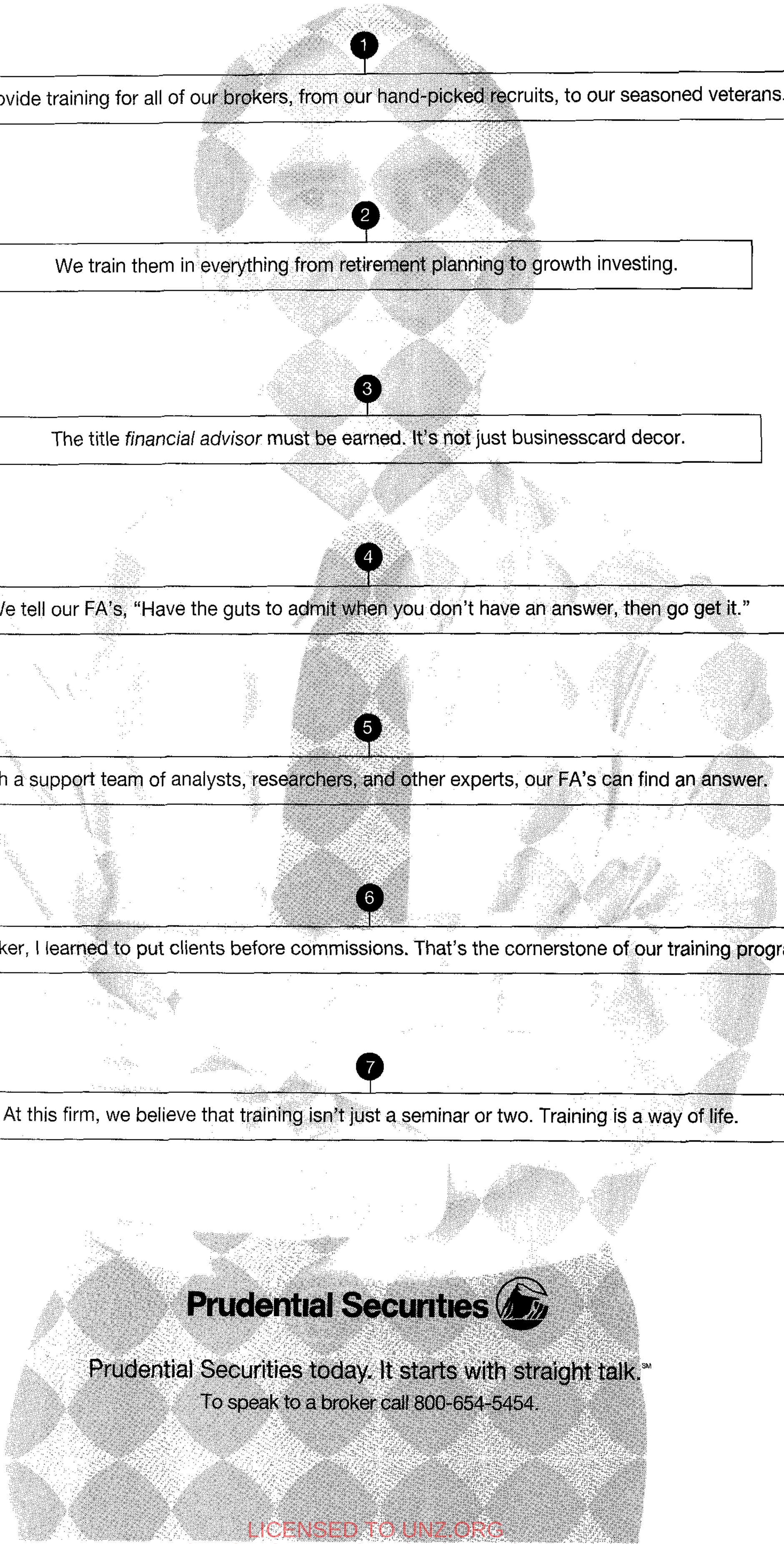
Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. (752-0824)—A retrospective of Shiro Toyoda films. June 24 at 6:30: "Twilight Years" (1973).

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—A series of films produced by ZDF German Television Network since the fall of the Berlin Wall. June 23 at 6: "Tandem" (1991, Bernhard Stephan). . . . June 24 at 6: "The Hammer Killer" (1990, Bernd Schadewald). . . . June 25 at 2: "Violence Is the Last Resort" (1993, Rainer Kaufmann). . . . June 26 at 2: "My Father, the Terrorist" (1993, Heiner Carow). . . . ¶ A tribute to Dennis Potter. "Without Walls" (1994), a television interview of Potter by Melvyn Bragg. Showings Tuesdays through Thursdays at 4, Fridays at 4 and 7:30, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1:30. . . . "Lipstick on Your Collar" (1993), a six-hour program, shown in two parts. Part I is showing Saturdays at 3 and Part II is showing Sundays at 3.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (570-3949)—June 24 at 7: "Autobiography of a Princess" (1975, James Ivory). . . . ¶ June 25 at 7: "Salaam Bombay!" (1988, Mira Nair; in Hindi).

Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 41st St.—Mondays, starting at dusk, free drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with Looney Tunes cartoons and coming attractions. The feature film on June 27 will be George Stevens' 1953 "Shane," with Alan Ladd. The feature film on July 4 will be Michael Curtiz's 1942 "Yankee Doodle Dandy," with James Cagney. (Rain date will be the following night.)

Film al Fresco, at Le Madri Restaurant, 168 W. 18th St. (727-8022)—Sunday evenings, more films out of doors, with food and live music beginning at 6 and the main feature starting at about 9. On June 26, Jim Jarmusch's 1986 film "Down By Law," with Tom Waits, and on July 3, Elio Petri's 1970 film, in Italian, "Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion," with Gian Maria Volonte.



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MOVIES IN BRIEF

FILMS OPENING

Baby's Day Out—John Hughes, the man who brought you "Home Alone," wrote this slapstick comedy about a nine-month-old boy out to wreak havoc in the mean city streets. With Joe Mantegna, Lara Flynn Boyle, and Joe Pantoliano. Directed by Patrick Read Johnson. Opening July 1.

Blown Away—Tommy Lee Jones is a brilliant mad bomber and Jeff Bridges is a Boston bomb-squad officer. With Lloyd Bridges, Forest Whitaker, and Suzy Amis. Screenplay by Joe Batteer and John Rice. Directed by Stephen Hopkins. Opening July 1.

Freedom on My Mind—A documentary about the civil-rights movement in Mississippi from 1961 to 1964. Winner of the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary. Directed by Connie Field and Marilyn Mulford. June 22-July 5.

I Love Trouble—A thriller starring Julia Roberts and Nick Nolte as rival journalists who team up to investigate the conspiracy behind a train sabotage. Directed by Charles Shyer, from a script by Shyer and Nancy Myers. Opening June 29.

Little Big League—A twelve-year-old boy inherits the Minnesota Twins from his grandfather and takes over the slumping team as owner-manager. With Luke Edwards, Jason Robards, Ashley Crow, Dennis Farina, and Timothy Busfield. Written by Gregory Pincus and Adam Scheinman and directed by Andrew Scheinman. Opening June 29.

A Place in the World—A film by the Uruguayan director Adolfo Aristarain. Gaston Batyi plays a young man who returns to the village where he grew up, and remembers his first love and his parents' utopian efforts to create a farming coöperative, clinic, and school. With Jose Sacristan, Federico Luppi, Cecilia Roth, and Leonor Benedetto. In Spanish. Opening July 1.

The Shadow—David Koepp's screenplay is based on the radio and movie serial of the thirties and forties. Alec Baldwin is Lamont Cranston, the rich playboy whose secret identity is the masked superhero who knows the evil that lurks in the hearts of men. With John Lone as his nemesis. Also with Penelope Ann Miller, Peter Boyle, Jonathan Winters, and Tim Curry. Directed by Russell Mulcahy. Opening July 1.

Thieves Quartet—A million-dollar Chicago kidnapping scheme goes awry in this dark psychological thriller. With Phillip Van Lear, Michele Cole, James Eichling, and Joe Guastaferro. Written and directed by Joe Chappelle. Opening June 24.

Wyatt Earp—The latest trip to the O.K. Corral is a three-hour film spanning more than three decades in the life of the legendary lawman Wyatt Earp, portrayed by Kevin Costner. With Dennis Quaid as Doc Holliday. Also starring Gene Hackman, Michael Madsen, Isabella Rossellini, Catherine O'Hara, and Mare Winningham. Directed by Lawrence Kasdan. Opening June 24.

CURRENT FILMS

(The following notes are by Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

The Boys of St. Vincent—From the outside, St. Vincent—an orphanage, run by a Roman Catholic religious order, in St. John's, Newfoundland—is Boys Town; on the inside, it's a Dickensian hell, in which trapped boys burn for their elders' sins. The head Brother, Peter Lavin (Henry Czerny), is a monster, constantly forcing his sexual attentions on ten-year-old Kevin Reevey (Johnny Morina), and he's not the only abuser on the staff. John N. Smith's movie—a two-part film, made for Canadian television—is muckraking social drama that transforms itself, in the course of its three hours, into something far more disturbing than a straightforward exposé. Part I, set in 1975, is nearly as haunting an evocation of children's helplessness as "The Night of the Hunter." Part II, set fifteen years later, is about the helplessness of adults, and is even finer. Czerny's performance is extraordinary. And Smith, not satisfied with simply provoking moral indignation, zooms in closer and closer on the damaged souls of the abused and the abusers; he ends up with a startlingly detailed picture of spiritual chaos. Also with Sebastian Spence, Lise Roy, and David Hewlett. Screenplay by Smith, Des Walsh, and Sam Grana.—T.R. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/6/94.) (Film Forum.)

Bruce Brown's The Endless Summer II—Once again, Brown sends two surfers—here Robert (Wingnut) Weaver and Patrick O'Connell—around the world. With the exception of some freak-out wildlife footage, the gap between the buddy-buddy hijinks and the transcendental surfing sequences is embarrassing. In one way, the gap is authentic. These guys fulfill themselves on their boards—that's where they achieve genuine drama, comedy, and poetry. When Brown tries to express their passion verbally, outside of lingo like "ripping" and "stoked," he ends up devaluing it. For surfing fanatics, this movie is a repeatable fix; for the rest of us, one "Endless Summer" every thirty years is probably enough. Co-written by Dana Brown, Bruce's son.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, and Cinema II.)

City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold—For roughly two-thirds of the way, it's hysterical in every sense—a galloping leap up from the original. Although Billy Crystal, the star and moving force, still gets a mite dewy-eyed and messagey (this time about brotherly love), he manages to parody as well as act out the fantasies and sensitivities of fortyish urban males. With best pal Daniel Stern and cadging kid brother Jon Lovitz, Crystal heads West again, this time to hunt for gold, using a map he finds in the hat of the dead trail boss Curly (Jack Palance). Is Curly dead? Or does Crystal keep seeing his ghost? Those questions kick-start the comedy. What sustains it is the three-way chemistry of the ingratiating Everyguy Crystal, the pathetically vulnerable, almost fetal Stern, and the dissembling know-it-all Lovitz, who does a virtuoso job of teetering between being an idiot savant and an idiot. Palance is irrepressible. Paul Weiland directed, for the most part briskly, the script by Crystal, Lowell Ganz, and Babaloo Mandel.—M.S. (Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Guild; through June 28. . . . ¶ Embassy; starting June 29.)

Even Cowgirls Get the Blues—After "Drugstore Cowboy" and "My Own Private Idaho," a real disappointment from Gus Van Sant. His imagination still wanders off in amiable and perplexing directions, but the picture, adapted from Tom Robbins' novel, gives him nothing much to discover. Uma Thurman stars as Sissy, the hitcher with the phallic thumbs. The plot gets stuck on a women's ranch called the Rubber Rose, and the film dissipates in a flurry of consciously struck poses and cameo roles. It's a road movie going round in circles, and it ends without warning, completely out of gas. The cool, swooning soundtrack by k.d. lang hints at the trip it might have been.—A.L. (5/30/94) (Angelika Film Center, and 68th St. Playhouse.)

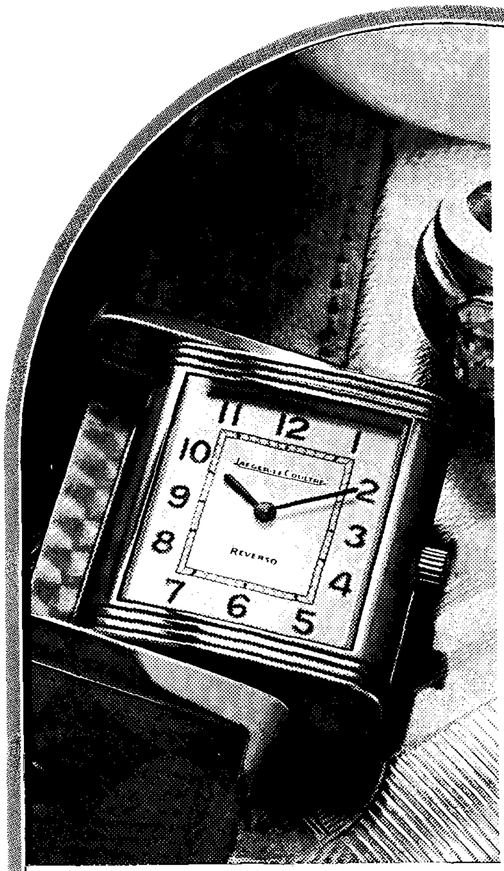
Fear of a Black Hat—This scrappy mockumentary about a group called Niggaz With Hats (N.W.H.) is livelier and raunchier than "CB4," the previous attempt to do "This Is Spinal Rap." It includes a definitive explanation of the difference between a "ho" and a "bitch." Powered by uninhibited effrontery, if weakened by repetition, the movie disrespects gangsta gurus, hot black directors, and managers, producers, and commentators of every hue. A film to see in a funky mood, it's likably haphazard and low-down, riffing on the same adolescent attitudes it pillories. Rusty Cundieff wrote, directed, and stars as Ice Cool, the leader of the band; Larry B. Scott is the N.W.H. militant, Tasty-Taste; Mark Christopher Lawrence is Tone Def, the cryptic deep thinker; and Kasi Lemmons is the Ph.D. candidate who interviews them.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas, and Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

THE FLINTSTONES—The latest and least advisable attempt to turn a cartoon into a live-action feature. The cast looks sound enough—John Goodman as Fred Flintstone, Elizabeth Perkins as Wilma, Rick Moranis and Rosie O'Donnell as the Rubbles—but the script, cobbled together by a crowd of writers, gives them nothing but a handful of limp gags. The saving grace is Elizabeth Taylor as Fred's mother-in-law, the terrifying Pearl Slaghoople. Directed by Brian Levant, who made "Beethoven." This is an even bigger dog.—A.L. (Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and National Twin. . . . ¶ Park & 86th Street Cinemas; through June 30.)

GETTING EVEN WITH DAD—If you really want revenge against a negligent father, just buy him a ticket to this movie. Macaulay Culkin stars as a precocious eleven-year-old in this towhead-knows-best fable; in the course of a week, he domesticates and reforms his ex-con dad (Ted Danson). The director, Howard Deutch, puts talented comic performers through diluted "Home Alone" slapstick contortions—notably Saul Rubinek and Gailard Sartain, who do a forced variation on the Daniel Stern–Joe Pesci roles. The screenplay, by two of this season's biggest art criminals (Tom S. Parker and Jim Jennewein, the lead writers for "The Flintstones"), alternates schmalz that makes you gag with gags that make you gag. With Glenne Headly, Kathleen Wilhoite, Dann Florek, and Hector Elizondo.—M.S. (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

GO FISH—This low-budget black-and-white gabfest with pseudo-poetic montages and a Greek chorus of gay mentors has been hailed as the first lesbian crossover movie. Go figure. The kind of young, kind of now Max, a real cutie (played by co-writer and co-producer Guinevere Turner), takes the whole ninety-minute running time to get it on with the plain, hippie-ish Ely (V. S. Brodie). It's supposed to be a triumph of Max's maturing sensibilities that she sees past Ely's looks and dated style, but Ely lacks even the proverbial great personality, and in movie terms they're a bad match. The film plays like the story of an arranged marriage—friends spend more time making Max and Ely an item than the lovers do. Rose Troche, the director (and co-producer and co-writer), celebrates the joys and touches on the tensions of pairing, nesting, and community. She and Turner provide affable conversation, but it's not dramatic dialogue. Their work may be empowering, etc.; as a movie, it's depleting.—M.S. (Angelika Film Center, and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

THE LION KING—Disney's new animated feature is a coming-of-age story about animal royalty. It's "Bambi," but with carnivores. The hero, a young lion named Simba, is born to the purple, but before he can ascend to the throne he has to make cute friends, court a soft-eyed female of the species, and see his father die (in a scene that may actually jerk kids' tears more shamelessly than its counterpart in "Bambi"). Between traumas, the movie serves up soothingly banal musical numbers (composed by Elton John and Tim Rice) and silly, rambunctious comedy. It's such an extreme example of the you'll-laugh-you'll-cry aesthetic that we begin to suspect that the directors, Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, are just flaunting their power, showing us that they can manipulate our re-



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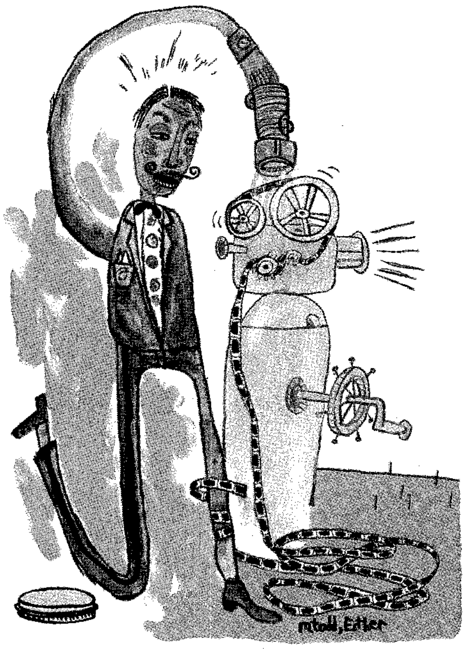
IN BRIEF—Cont'd

sponses at will. The animation, computer-assisted in some of the more elaborate sequences, is sometimes impressive, but rarely impressive enough to overcome a certain impersonality—a stubborn mechanical coldness. Among the celebrity voices on the soundtrack, two performances stand out: Jeremy Irons, as the villainous lion Scar, does an elegant, funny George Sanders impersonation, and Nathan Lane, reading the part of a peppy, skeptical meerkat, gives the picture a welcome shot at Warners-style brashness.—T.R. (6/20/94) (Radio City Music Hall; through June 23. . . . ¶ Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy 1; starting June 24.)

Maverick—Richard Donner's big-screen version of the popular TV Western series of the fifties. The new Bret Maverick (Mel Gibson) is an antsy, wild-eyed, motor-mouthed charmer, like the deranged daredevil cop that Gibson plays in the "Lethal Weapon" pictures. The whole movie has a frantic quality that seems a poor substitute for the original's sly, relaxed humor. There are a few laughs, but the picture feels awfully long, because almost everyone is trying too hard: the few performers who aren't, like James Garner (the series' hero, on hand to play straight man to the star) and James Coburn, come off best. Also with Jodie Foster, Graham Greene, and Alfred Molina.—T.R. (6/6/94) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)



The Slingshot—A quaint, folkloric parable of resilience, set in Stockholm in the twenties. The ten-year-old hero, Roland (Jesper Salén), manufactures slingshots out of scrap metal and banned condoms. Actually, his inventions are more like boomerangs—every ingenious plan he concocts comes back to hit him in the head. Ake Sandgren's movie (based on an autobiographical novel by Roland Schütt) has unusually spicy ingredients for a Scandinavian coming-of-age story. Roland has a Russian Jewish mother (Basia Frydman), a Socialist father (Stellan Skarsgard), and a would-be boxer brother (Niclas Olund) who keeps bashing him in the nose; the boy faces fearsome prejudices at school and bewildering frustrations at home. He's refreshingly tough, but the movie lacks richness and impact. The final note of affirmation seems forced, because the writer-director hasn't dug deep enough into Roland's character to suggest the man he'll become. In Swedish.—M.S. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Speed—Trouble on the Los Angeles freeway. Evil mastermind Dennis Hopper (who else?) is a disgruntled psycho who wires a bomb to the bottom of a city bus. If the speed drops below fifty, boom. Enter Keanu Reeves as a young cop who is one step behind Hopper, but catching up fast; we are way behind the movie, which outwits our expectations at every turn. The director is Jan De Bont, who used to be a cameraman; this is his first feature, and he sees the plot through in a surge of bright images. The result is clean, delirious, and, yes, speedy—the best big-vehicle-in-peril movie since Clouzot's "The Wages of Fear." But that film offered a vision of human duplicity pitted against a dour fate; De Bont's work is a mindlessly cheerful occasion for high humor, initiative, and good luck—and a great, gutsy turn from Sandra Bullock as a passenger who finds herself behind the wheel of the bus. You leave the theatre exhausted, and blissed out.—A.L. (6/13/94) (Murray Hill Cinemas, Baronet, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and Criterion Center.)

White—The second in Krzysztof Kieślowski's "Three Colors" trilogy—"Blue" was released *here in 1993, and* "Red" was recently screened at the Cannes festival—is the story of a Chaplinesque Polish Everyman named Karol Karol (Zbigniew Zamachowski). The picture traces his progress from utter ignominy, in Paris, to a strange kind of personal power, which he acquires in the unsettled new society of his homeland. Kieślowski's has abandoned the elegantly abstract style and enigmatic tones of his recent work and has adopted instead a folksy-picaresque manner, which doesn't suit him. Mysteriously, this great filmmaker lacks the mundane skills to keep us interested in a story that has no real spiritual *dimension:* the characters are monotonous, the storytelling isn't clear, and the images look flat, merely functional. In this picture Kieślowski isn't searching for immanence: everything has only its face value, and you feel as if a light had gone out in the world. Also with Julie Delpy. In French and Polish.—T.R. (6/20/94) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow.)

The Big Combo (1955)—Joseph H. Lewis ("Gun Crazy") directed this rabidly amusing B movie from a Philip Yordan script. The word "combo" refers to "the Combination" (read: Mob or Mafia), here headed by one of movie gangland's old reliables, Richard Conte. Cornel Wilde stars as the police lieutenant determined to topple Conte. Wilde's real-life wife, Jean Wallace, plays a cultured blonde who's Conte's moll and Wilde's obsession. Lewis and Yordan fill the melodrama with intriguing peculiarities. A hearing aid becomes the Combo chief's prime tool of torture; his ultimate defense against exposure is a writ of habeas corpus. Lee Van Cleef and Earl Holliman, as his hit men, and Brian Donlevy, as Conte's ex-boss and current flunky, form a generational study of film thughood. Lewis goes in for Cheapside chiaroscuro. It pays off when Wallace uses a spotlight to trace Conte's zigzag flight through a dark airport.—M.S. (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 26 and July 2.)

Broken Arrow (1950)—Everybody seems to enjoy this movie. It's full of legend and romance and action. The setting is Arizona in those confused days after the Civil War when renegades from both armies were causing trouble among the Indians. James Stewart plays the ex-Union officer who befriends the Apache Cochise (Jeff Chandler) and marries an Apache princess (Debra Paget). Delmer Daves directed this adaptation by Michael Blankfort of the novel "Blood Brother," by Elliott Arnold, and though the picture never won any Academy Awards or brotherhood awards, it has probably done more to soften the hearts of racists than most movies designed to instruct, indict, and inspire. (That Indian princess was no squaw.) Part of the pleasure of the film is that its treatment of the Indians-vs.-settlers theme doesn't violate the conventions of the genre.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; June 23-26.)

Forbidden Games (1952)—René Clément's beautiful, lacerating film on the themes of innocence, Christianity, war, and death. It is perhaps the greatest war film since "La Grande Illusion." (Neither deals with actual warfare.) On a crowded highway outside Paris in 1940, a delicate five-year-old girl wanders away from the strafed bodies of her parents, clutching her dead puppy in her arms. She and an eleven-year-old peasant boy become playmates: their game—their passion—is to collect dead animals for their private cemetery, and for this game they steal crosses from churches and graveyards. Clément's method of presentation—a series of harsh contrasts, with on the one side the intuitive, lyric understanding between the two children and on the other the ludicrous comedy of the quarrelsome, ignorant peasant adults—is perhaps unfair to the adults. But it's an act of kindness to the audience: without this element of gross caricature, we might dissolve in tears. This classic of the French postwar period was a commercial failure until it won the grand prize at Venice; it went on to international success. With Brigitte Fossey and Georges Poujouly. From the novel by François Boyer. In French.—P.K. (Theatre 80 St. Marks; June 26.)

The Wizard of Oz (1939)—The most animated of live-action movies, M-G-M's adaptation of L. Frank Baum's first Oz book ranks with Disney's "Pinocchio" as the best kids' fare Old Hollywood brought forth. The filmmakers conjured a fantasy at once out of this world and down to earth. To a man (and woman, and dwarf), the ensemble mastered a broad masquerade style—the peak practitioners are Bert Lahr, whose Cowardly Lion knows only the roar of the greasepaint, and Ray Bolger, whose Scarecrow does a stumbling comic dance just flopping down the Yellow Brick Road. Judy Garland strikes a deep yearning note when singing "Over the Rainbow," then modulates it with girlish enthusiasm. Geoff Ryman's recent novel "Was" describes a boy watching the 1956 TV-network première in black-and-white and falling into a dream that he is seeing it in color. The Technicolor glory of Oz lives up to a child's imaginative expectations—the cinematographer, Harold Rosson, is a key contributor to this classic, along with songwriters Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg, the credited director (Victor Fleming) and writers (Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, Edgar Allan Woolf), and Jack Haley (as the Tin Man), Frank Morgan (as the Wizard), Margaret Hamilton (as the Wicked Witch), and Toto (as himself).—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; June 24 and 26.)

Woodstock (1970)—Michael Wadleigh's documentary of the epochal 1969 rock extravaganza captures groovy musical highs and rain-soaked chaos. While counterculture anthems waft through the soundtrack, the film builds on pictures of hippies on horseback and workers preparing Max Yasgur's farm for a crowd that grew to roughly half a million. By the time Richie Havens starts the program, the movie audience is primed to be uplifted. Wadleigh and his fellow-cinematographers frame telling images of legendary performances, including The Who in a paroxysm from "Tommy" and Joe Cocker playing neurotic air guitar as he wails "With a Little Help from My Friends." The split-screen imagery augments this you-are-there trip. Martin Scorsese and Thelma Schoonmaker assisted Wadleigh and also edited (along with Jere Huggins and others). The four-hour director's cut, expanded by about an hour, includes new footage of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Creedence Clearwater Revival.—M.S. (Village East Cinemas; starting June 29.)

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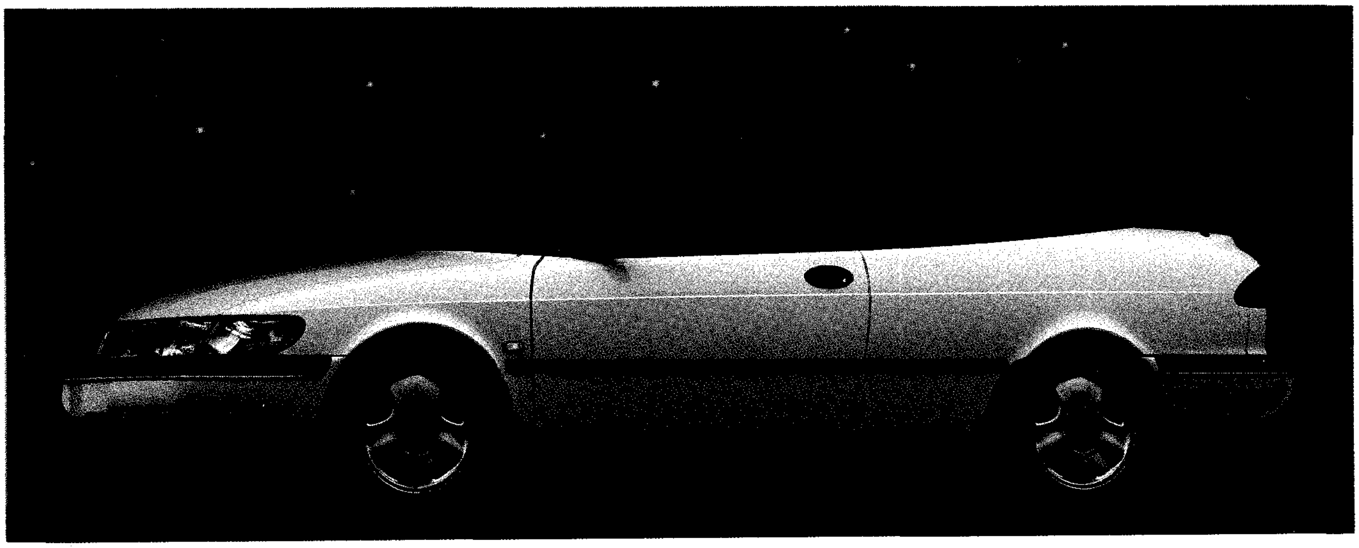

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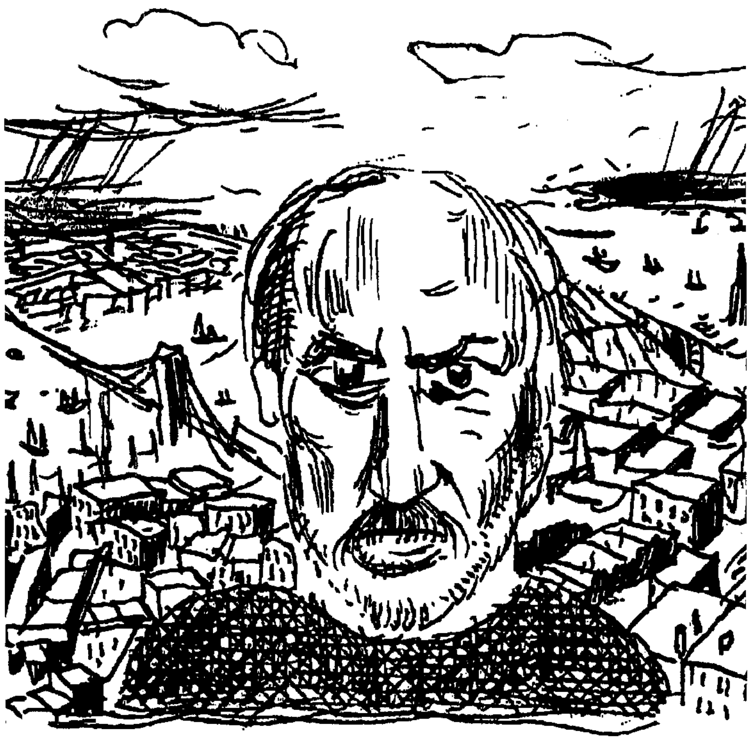
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

DOCTOROW'S CITY

In E. L. Doctorow's latest novel, "The Waterworks," New York—as it has been in most of his previous novels—is a character, as mythic as any other character in the story. This time, it is the city of Boss Tweed. Earlier, it was the city of Dutch Schultz ("Billy Bathgate") or J. P. Morgan ("Ragtime") or the Rosenbergs ("The Book of Daniel"). "I never had grand literary plans with one book fitting into another, but it turns out that New York is home for my imagination—which is convenient, since I live here," Doctorow said over coffee the other day. He has a pleasant, deliberate way of talking—soothing, like a dentist promising not to injure. "But it came to me without any real conscious planning, and now, if you begin with 'The Waterworks,' in 1871, and then move on to 'Ragtime' and 'Billy Bathgate' and then 'The Book of Daniel,' you have a rendering of a hundred years of New York life. But it really is *my* New York. I'm not a documentarian or a journalist. It's not Woody Allen's New York. And it's certainly not Edith Wharton's New York. It's everything that Edith Wharton left out; it's about the rest of us."

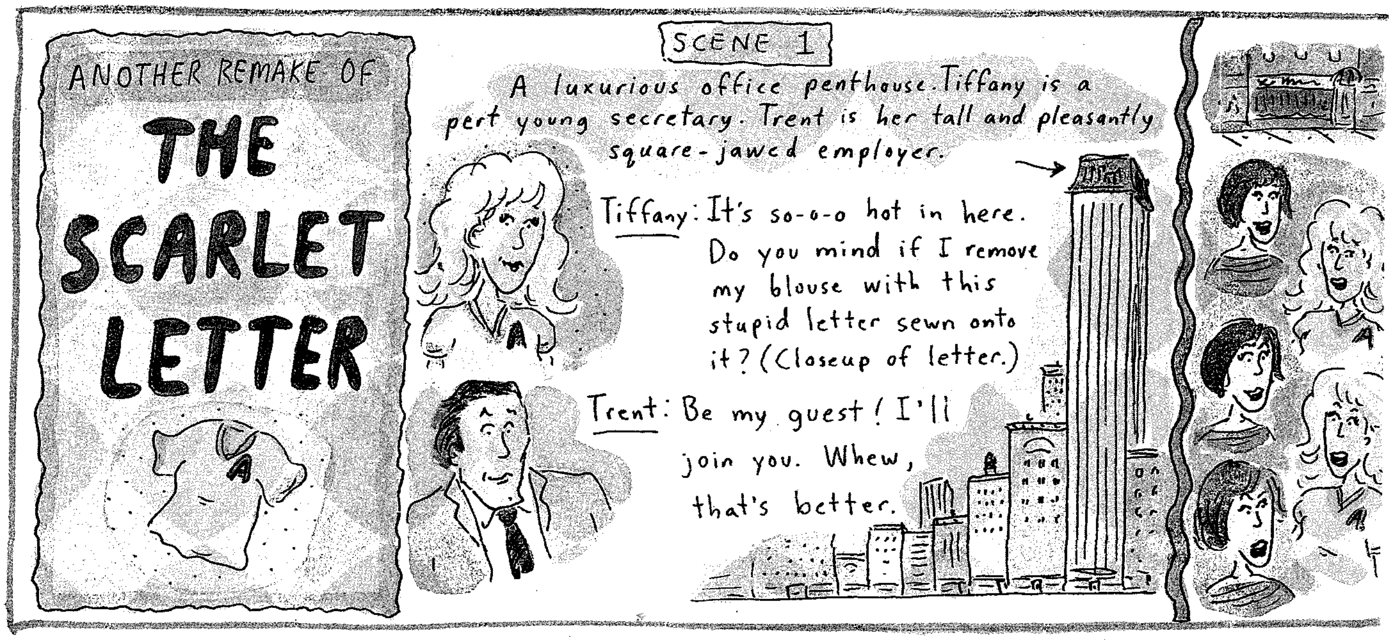


ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY PANTER

Doctorow went on, "The truth is, I don't see my books as historical novels. My interest has more to do with myth than with history. Without comparing myself to Hawthorne, I'd have to say that 'The Scarlet Letter' is not a historical novel even though it described a period one hundred and fifty years before Hawthorne lived. You aspire to writing a book so that the difference between periods—between the author's time and the characters' time—disappears. There is in every age a presumption of modernity. We have computers and CD-ROM and all the rest, but in 1871 they had the rotary press, which gave birth to the modern newspaper, and they sent cables through wires under the ocean. In 'The Waterworks,' there are children selling flowers or themselves on the street, or they're sleeping on the shop floors where they worked. Now we have kids who bring guns to school, a terrible spiritual vagrancy. In those days, the rich kept moving uptown—even north of Forty-second Street!—to avoid the new immigrants. Now, once more, we have the same thing; people are moving away to avoid the new immigration. So times are different and not different. When you write about the past, you are always reflecting your own age."

What sort of historical research does he do for his novels?

"The research I do is, well, *just enough* research," he replied. "I wouldn't even call it research, even though I'll do some reading, take some walks. A key evening in the imagining of 'The Waterworks' came when I was just looking out the window"—he lives in the Village—"and a fog began to descend on the city. It started moving slowly down, eliminating the World Trade Center, the Woolworth Building, the twentieth century. Finally, what was left was the nineteenth century. I was looking out at the Village and then went walking on lower Broadway, and I thought, This is Melville's New York you're looking at! Is that research?"


ANOTHER REMAKE OF
THE SCARLET LETTER
SCENE 1
A luxurious office penthouse. Tiffany is a pert young secretary. Trent is her tall and pleasantly square-jawed employer.
Tiffany: It's so-o-o hot in here. Do you mind if I remove my blouse with this stupid letter sewn onto it? (Closeup of letter.)
Trent: Be my guest! I'll join you. Whew, that's better.

BOOKS ARE THINGS, TOO

When the only known copy of "Hike and the Aeroplane," a pseudonymous children's book by Sinclair Lewis, came up at auction not long ago—make that the only known copy with the *original dust jacket*—Carter Burden nearly lost it; his senses, that is. The book as something to read, Mr. Burden readily acknowledges, is "of no literary merit." But an original dust jacket is another matter; just ask Michael Jackson—*the* Michael Jackson—who, Mr. Burden likes to recall, joined in the bidding and kind of lost it, too, for the "Hike and the Aeroplane" with jacket. Mr. Burden got it, for seventeen thousand five hundred dollars. "I cannot explain or justify it," he says. "It's like people describe fox hunts, when hounds get the scent."

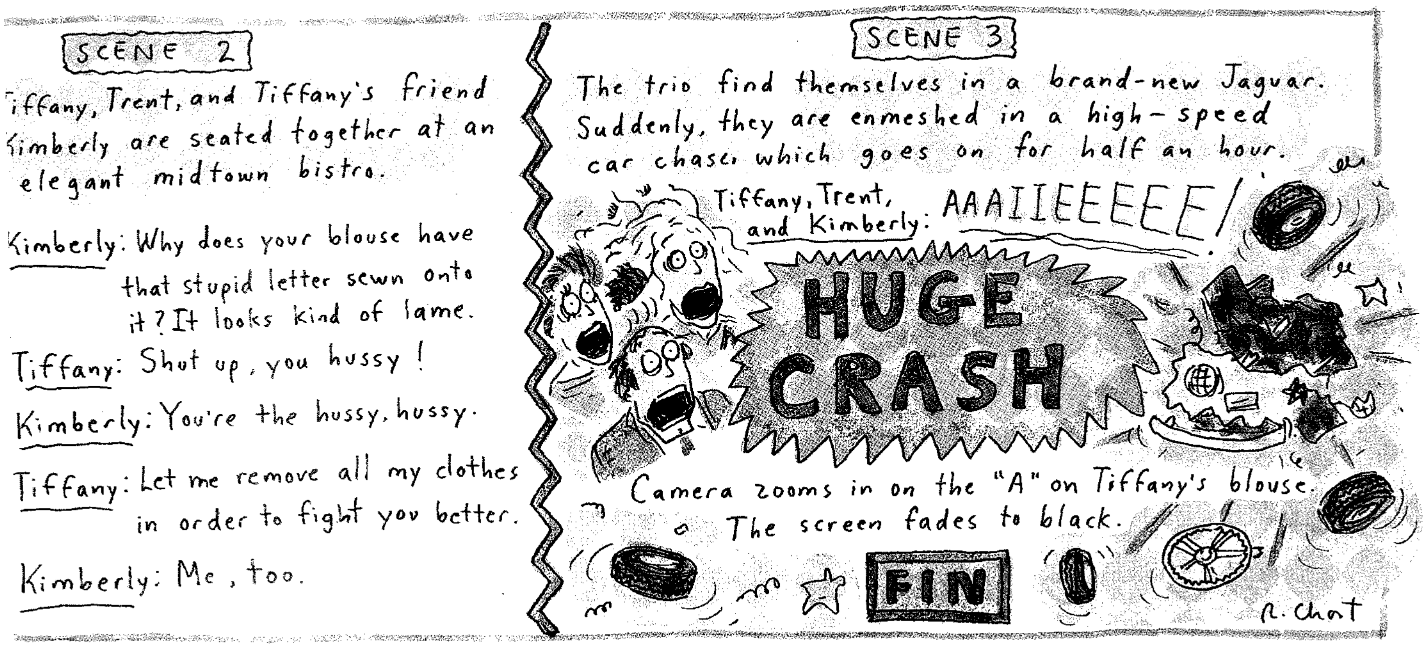
Mr. Burden is fifty-two years old, tall, tanned, professionally rich, and descended from Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt—he looks like someone who should be foxhunting. But, as the world's foremost collector of modern American literary books and papers, he prefers chasing things like first editions, correspondence between authors, and dust jackets. When we recently visited his apartment, on Fifth Avenue across from the Metropolitan Museum, he immediately ushered us into his living room-cum-library, a grand, two-story space. There were drawings by Matisse and Klee; there were fine ivory objects; and there were ten thousand volumes, arranged alphabetically by author, in ornately carved mahogany bookcases. (Twenty thousand additional books are in storage, he said.)

Mr. Burden explained that he likes to have a comprehensive collection of the work of important modern American authors—Faulkner, Hemingway, Pound, and hundreds of others—which means that for every title, he owns limited editions, trade editions, first English editions, and, when available, authors' proofs. He also has manuscripts, inscribed books, and dedication copies. Chronologically speaking, his collection begins with Henry James and ends—at the moment—with "The Virgin Suicides," a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, which was published last year. He showed us a highly pedigreed copy of "The Golden Bowl," which had been inscribed by James to his friend Walter Berry, the man of letters, and once belonged to Harry Crosby, the expatriate American publisher in Paris of Pound and Joyce. He showed us a slim box containing a hundred and thirty letters from Thomas Pynchon to his then agent, Candida Donadio, in which Pynchon compared her to a guru, claimed that reading "The Snow Leopard," by Peter Matthiessen, was keeping him sane, and—an odd thing for the most reclusive author in America—lamented his lack of privacy. Mr. Burden then sat down and told us that his passion for collecting had begun when he was a child, with toy soldiers, and so had his appreciation for literature.

"It's such a cliché," he said. "I was fat and unpopular and lonely and I started reading very early, and it became the great resource of my life."

It wasn't until he was an adult that he decided to devote some of his considerable other resources to collecting books. One day about fifteen years ago, he was thumbing through a Sotheby's catalogue, and came across an entry for a first edition of Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer," which had been the subject of his undergraduate thesis at Harvard. He bought the book, then another, and then a lot of others. By the end of the eighties, he had accumulated eighty thousand volumes by seven thousand authors. He stuffed his eighteen-room apartment with the books, a habit that did not always please his two children or his wife, Susan. "Susan was convinced the floor was going to collapse," he said. "I built bookshelves in my son's room, and he just never let me forget it—he was furious. I would come in, and he had a lot of quite disreputable-looking friends, and I'd see them pulling out 'A Lume Spento' and have a heart attack." That's Pound's first book, and in the edition Mr. Burden owns is worth about seventy-five thousand dollars.

A few years ago, Mr. Burden decided to prune the collection. He sold a lot of


SCENE 2
iffany, Trent, and Tiffany's friend imberly are seated together at an elegant midtown bistro.
Kimberly: Why does your blouse have that stupid letter sewn onto it? It looks kind of lame.
Tiffany: Shut up, you hussy!
Kimberly: You're the hussy, hussy.
Tiffany: Let me remove all my clothes in order to fight you better.
Kimberly: Me, too.
SCENE 3
The trio find themselves in a brand-new Jaguar. Suddenly, they are enmeshed in a high-speed car chase, which goes on for half an hour.
Tiffany, Trent, and Kimberly: AAAIIEEEEE!
HUGE CRASH
Camera zooms in on the "A" on Tiffany's blouse. The screen fades to black.
FIN
R. Chast

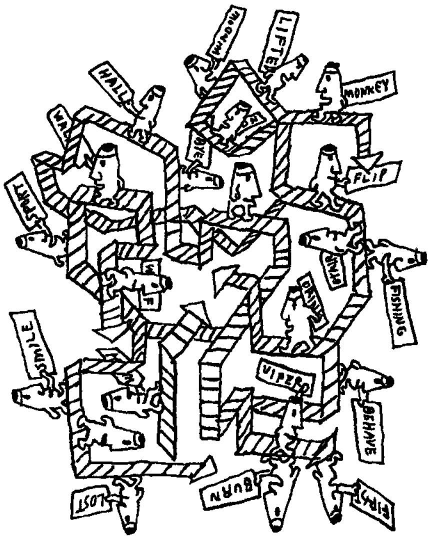
books, including volumes of T. S. Eliot (who he decided wasn't really American) and "Tarzan of the Apes" (which he decided wasn't really literature). He donated books to Harvard and the Pierpont Morgan Library, and he gave his entire science-fiction trove to the New York Public Library. He says he's searching for only a hundred books or so to complete his library. At the top of his list is Edith Wharton's rare first book, "Verses."

"Louis Auchincloss had a copy," he said. "I made the mistake of telling him how valuable it was and that I would be interested in buying it from him, whereupon he immediately gave it to the Morgan."

THE PLEASURES OF THE (HYPER)TEXT

STUDENTS who a few years ago might have enrolled in the Iowa Writers' Workshop or in the classes run here by Gordon Lish are now checking into the Hypertext Hotel, the nation's first on-line writing space devoted to the computer-generated mode of literature known as hypertext. The Hypertext Hotel was started in 1991 by Robert Coover, who teaches creative writing at Brown University, and whose own writing—the stories in "Pricksongs and Descants," for example—sometimes reads like hypertext fettered to the technology of print. Each of the seventeen students accepted into the hypertext fiction class every semester gets ten megabytes of hard-disk space in Brown's "cluster server" (its big computer). There the students work on and store their term project—a hypertext fiction composed of numerous "windows" (electronic pages upon which one writes) and "links" (connections between the windows that create the structure of a "text"). Each student gets to create a character that takes up residence in the Hypertext Hotel, and these characters, in turn, can fall in love, commit murder, and do any of the other things people do in books. Students in the class have on-line access to one another's works in progress, but they can't actually alter what another student is working on.

Students who spend time in the Hypertext Hotel are learning not only to write hypertext but also to get acquainted with what it feels like to be inside a hypertext fiction. Theodor H. Nelson, the media philosopher who coined the word "hypertext," called computers "literary machines," and that's an excellent way to think of hypertext novels. Printed novels are literary machines, too, in a sense, but the machinery is clunky. The ending is always going to stay at the end. The reader's eye almost always goes from the period at the end of one sentence to the capital letter at the start of the next. Page 87 is permanently "linked" to page 86. In hypertext fiction, you don't need to observe these limits. Throughout the text the reader can choose which way he wants to go. Hard-core theoreticians of hypertext argue that the linear nature of traditional fiction is mainly the result of the technology of bookmaking, and that as digital technology spreads further into literary culture the importance of linear narrative will fade. Whether by coincidence or by cosmic plan, the technology of hypertext makes it possible to design texts that work the way Roland Barthes and other structuralist critics said that they should work—texts that are "networks of references," and are ultimately collaborations between writers and readers, rather than autonomous, complete entities. Multiple endings and multiple narratives and multiple points of view are possible. Some of the hypertexts come with maps, which show you where in the fiction you are; in others, you have to feel your way around.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LIFTER
HALL
MONKEY
BYE
FLIP
FISHING
SMILE
VIPERS
BEHAVE
LOST
BURN
FIRST

It turns out that the kind of novels

the structuralists had in mind aren't very satisfying to read, at least not yet. Too many of the people who write hypertext fiction are computer-oriented, and their notion of narrative drive more resembles a quest than a plot—reading hypertext is sort of like playing those video games where the point is to make it to the next level without having some badass rip out your heart. However, hypertext is certainly fun to think about, and one of the best places to do that is the Hypertext Hotel. Anyone with Internet access can visit the hotel, and, once there, can embellish the existing structure (with marginalia). Only students and those writers Coover has invited (among them, Kathy Acker; Carolyn Guyer, a writer of hypertext fiction; and Michael Joyce, whose "Afternoon, A Story" is considered a classic of the genre) can actually contribute to its architecture; that is, write hypertext. This is done by building a room—establishing a text window and filling it with enough language to make it appear like a physical space, onscreen—or by creating a link between rooms (this is as much a programming as a literary exercise). Readers get around inside the hotel by typing "follow" and then the room they want to go to. If you type "follow Room 666," for example, a block of text scrolls up your screen which says:

> There is a knock on the door to Room 666.
>
> The knocker . . . whispers, "Elaine, we need a new bartender. The last one dissolved in the sunlight."
>
> She nods and takes a breath. She puts her hand inside her stomach and pulls out an ugly, bloody, mucus-painted love child.
>
> "Such a pretty boy," she says and pats its head.
>
> In 24 hours, it will be 18 years old and ready for work.

Not long ago, the Program in Creative Writing at Brown tried to hold a hypertext convention in the Hypertext Hotel. About forty students and writers of hypertext showed up in the space at the same time. But soon characters were pulling one another's pants down and generally disrupting the proceedings, then pairing off and heading "upstairs." Even in hypertext, some things never change.

ALL YESTERDAY'S PARTIES

SINCE the late fifties, throughout the latest Decline of the Novel, George Plimpton has played genial host to the cocktail souls of literature. (The cause-and-effect relationship between the two phenomena remains ambiguous.) He began small, with Dinty Moore-beef-stew-based gatherings to celebrate, say, Peter Matthiessen's return from malarial climes. But soon he was throwing the glittering book-launch saturnalias that are now known around town simply as "Plimpton parties"—parties where the boozing and the quipping pause only when the host winds a brass horn to proffer a charming toast. Over the decades, Plimpton's triplex apartment, on Seventy-second Street by the East River, has accommodated battalions of tweed-clad revellers in pursuit of yesterday's author, today's critic, and tomorrow's hangover.

"After a while, the parties became a rialto, with people who were just getting going in publishing and writing coming here to meet their ilk," Plimpton recalled recently, sprawled in an armchair on the second floor of his place. "Since writing is rather a lonely business, having a place for gossip and shoptalk is essential. You can't write for more than three or four hours a day anyway—might as well come around for a drink."

Plimpton, at sixty-seven, is white-haired but still boyish-looking. He was wearing an oxford-cloth shirt, faded bluejeans, and Docksiders, and his fingers played with a pair of reading glasses. Downstairs, the staff of *The Paris Review* was mulling another issue of the quarterly, which Plimpton has edited since its founding, in 1953. On a pool table near where Plimpton sat, scattered snippets of his "Edie"-style oral history of Truman Capote awaited a master plan.

"People sometimes had a bit too much to drink," he went on. "I recall John Ashbery being carried down the stairs and out into the street—this large, prostrate figure being toted like a grand piano. And there seemed to be an awful lot of sex. You'd go where all the coats were lying, in the back, and you'd see somebody rather famous being done by somebody rather famous." He gave a low chortle.

"It achieved a groundswell of its own in the sixties, when parties were given when I wasn't even here," he continued. "I would be out in California or in France and I'd call up, and Terry Southern would answer, and I would hear the piano roaring in the background and the tinkling of breaking glass. After a while, you never really had any idea who would turn up. Irwin Shaw and Jimmy Baldwin and Alex Karras, the football tackle, and Lenny Bernstein and Warren Beatty. Jobim came once and played the guitar until 4 A.M. And at one party Andy Warhol drew a cow on the wall, which was later painted over. When the apartment is assessed, I'm going to say there's a Warhol in here somewhere. Norman Mailer, back in his rambunctious days, used to come in a competitive mood. One form it took with women was staring contests, to see who would look away first. Norman's other thing, which was really quite violent, was head-butting. You would hear this terrible crash, and two bodies would tumble to the floor. People would say, 'What's that?' And I'd say, 'Oh, that's just Norman doing his rutting exercises.' "

At the shank of an evening of—one imagines—particularly strenuous butting and coupling, the ceiling fell down on the apartment below. "It looked as if it had been bombed," Plimpton said, grinning.

Plimpton unlimbered himself to fetch a framed black-and-white photo of a party held, he thought, around 1967. Everyone in the photo clutched a highball and looked keen, witty, rivalrous. He bent over the distant faces. "There's Edward Albee—no, shoot, that's not Albee," he said. "There's Ralph Ellison, Mario Puzo, Styron. There's Doc Humes with his funny meerschaum pipe. Ashtrays. A lot of ashtrays. Truman Capote, of course. And there's Truman's dog, Bunky, or whatever the hell it was called."

Plimpton then generously offered a few tips for aspiring literary party-givers. "Have a lot of books around," he said. "It sets a motif. I never understood people who don't have bookshelves. Always try to serve drinks out of glasses rather than plastic cups—plastic demeans a party. And you must have extravagantly beautiful women. We've had some spectacular internes here, just out of college, and you keep an eye out for pretty editors to invite. Carol Alt used to come by every once in a while, which seemed to perk people up. And there is a formula for bottles of Scotch per person, but I've forgotten it." The low chortle. "Probably because I drink so much." ♦

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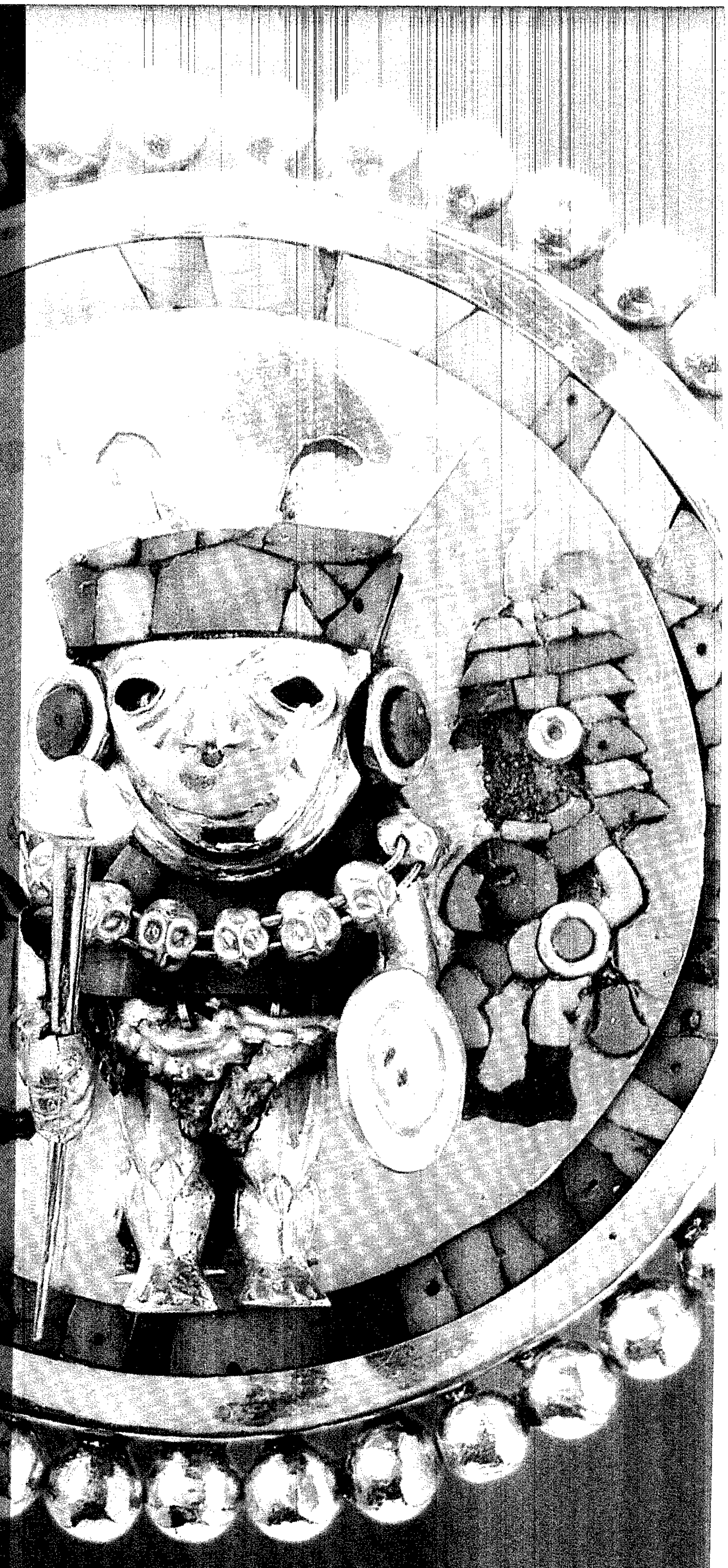

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THE PUBLISHING WORLD

MOBY DICK IN MANHATTAN

Can an acclaimed writer devote himself purely to his work and still make money? James Wilcox tried, and he's paying a high price for the literary life.

BY JAMES B. STEWART

When James Wilcox is working at the St. Francis Xavier Welcome Table, as the church's Sixteenth Street soup kitchen is called, on the first and second Sunday of every month, it's hard to tell he's an acclaimed novelist. It took some of his fellow-volunteers years to figure it out. None of them had read "Modern Baptists," his first novel, published in 1983, which was hailed in a *Times Book Review* front-page piece by Anne Tyler as "startlingly alive, exuberantly overcrowded." Nor were they familiar with its five siblings, three of them set in the fictional Tula Springs, Louisiana, which has been compared by more than one critic to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County.

Wilcox's humor has been described as Dickensian, and it has consigned him to a life of near-poverty.

Wilcox himself was much too shy to tell them about any of this. He looks younger than his age, which is forty-five, and has a slightly ruddy complexion, medium build, and sandy hair. Though he's nice-looking, he agonizes over his author photographs and didn't want one on his last book. Yale-educated, he speaks with no trace of a regional accent. His Southern roots are evident only in the elaborate courtesy with which he waits on the soup kitchen's "guests," as he unfailingly calls them when he is dispensing juice and coffee. He betrays little reaction even when something really grabs his attention, like the saga of a woman who was plagued by the stench from a neighbor who kept twenty-two cats in her Murray Hill one-bedroom apartment.

"For years, I never knew what Jim did," I was told by George Deshensky, a lawyer who is one of the directors of the soup kitchen. "Then, one day, someone said, 'He's a published author.' So we'd introduce him that way. We didn't know what he published or where." Deshensky began relying on Wilcox as a "calming influence" when altercations threatened to break out in the line—something that happened with some regularity. Since then, during the eight years that Wilcox has been working at the soup kitchen, he and Deshensky have become close friends and Deshensky has read his books. Still, Deshensky was surprised when, after he complimented Wilcox on the empathy he shows for the soup kitchen's impoverished patrons, Wilcox replied, "I'm only a check or two from being in the line myself."

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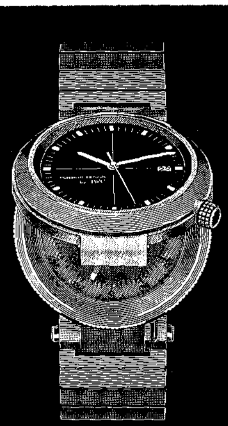

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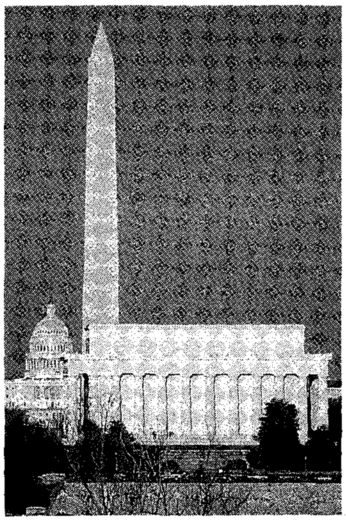

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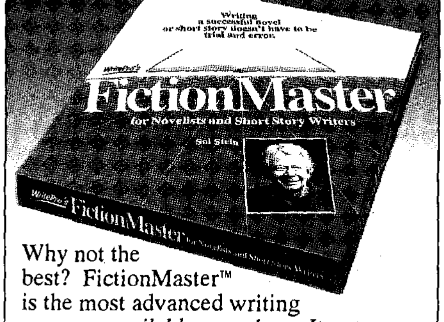
novelists, of course, as well as a handful of best-selling, highly publicized multimillionaires. But in the past twelve years James Wilcox has published six novels to rave reviews. While his books are classified as "literary fiction" by the publishing industry, they aren't inaccessible or highbrow. He has been described as a "comic genius" (*Vogue*), "a master" (*Kirkus Reviews*), "a natural. . . . One of the most promising fiction writers on the national scene" (Los Angeles *Times*), "among the classic American humorists" (*Newsday*), and "Dickensian in [his] wealth of eccentric characters" (New York *Times*). He has a high-powered agent, Amanda (Binky) Urban, of International Creative Management, who has consistently got him advances that were larger than could be justified strictly on the basis of the number of his books sold. In other words, among novelists Wilcox counts himself one of the lucky ones. Even so, the current state of publishing has consigned him to a life of near-poverty.

At my insistence, Wilcox, who is single and lives alone, showed me his tax returns for the past ten years. His best year was 1988, when he had a gross income of $48,600 before agent commissions (of ten per cent) and expenses. He now remembers that year as an aberration—a time when he could eat out occasionally, and even take a cab. And since that time, as the market for trade-paperback fiction has shrunk and authors' advances have declined, his income has dropped accordingly. In 1992, he earned twenty-five thousand dollars. Last year, it was fourteen thousand dollars. The advance for his current novel was ten thousand dollars; in a concession, his publisher gave him two-thirds up front, rather than the customary half. When I visited him recently, he had just finished the last of three meals he'd extracted from eighteen pieces of chicken he bought at Key Food for three dollars and forty cents.

Nor is Wilcox's plight confined to making ends meet. HarperCollins, which published his last five books, didn't exercise its option for his current project. Only Hyperion, the Disney publishing subsidiary, showed any interest in the manuscript, and then mostly because Rick Kot, the editor who championed Wilcox at Harper, had recently moved to Hyperion. Hyperion is a

A Tool No Writer Should Be Without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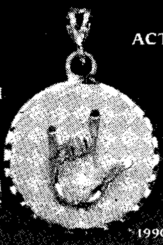

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smaller house, less able than HarperCollins to indulge a distinguished but unprofitable author. In Wilcox, commerce and art are now at a standoff, with Wilcox's future as a novelist at stake. At a time when some unpublished first novelists are igniting bidding wars and hauling down advances of half a million dollars, "we were lucky to get ten thousand dollars," Urban says of Wilcox's current contract. "This book is absolutely critical. Something has to happen."

LIKE Deshensky, I'm a friend of Jim's, who, before I began this story, had no idea of his dire financial plight. I met him a little more than a year ago, at a dinner party given by Urban to celebrate his latest novel, "Guest of a Sinner." Urban is my agent, too, but I hadn't realized that she represented Jim until I spotted a copy of "Sort of Rich," his fourth book, one day on her bookshelf and, because I was already a Wilcox fan, asked her to introduce me.

"Sort of Rich" is one of my favorite books. I bought it after reading a *Times* review, found something to think about on almost every page ("The twenty-four chicks Mrs. Dambar had purchased last week had dwindled to three as a result of an unpleasant disease and six or so getting lost on a walk she had taken them on to strengthen their leg muscles"), and returned to the bookstore a week later to buy another copy, as a gift. It was no longer in stock and wasn't being reordered—a situation that may help explain why it ultimately sold just forty-seven hundred copies in hardcover. Jim himself, I must confess, made less of an impression on me at Urban's dinner. Besides being overshadowed that night by last year's playoff between the Knicks and the Bulls, he was characteristically shy. We barely spoke. Afterward, though, he phoned and reminded me that we had actually met at a party five years before. He even remembered what we had discussed—piano playing.

Since then, we've met from time to time to play piano duets. Jim could have been a professional musician, and almost was, on both the cello and the piano. In our duets, he generally plays the more difficult "primo" parts, and, although he always maintains that he doesn't want to perform, we've given three small recit-

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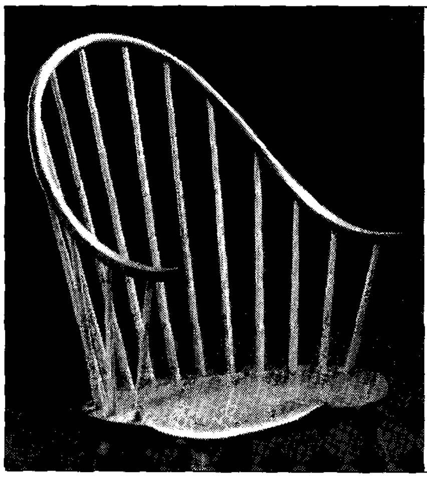

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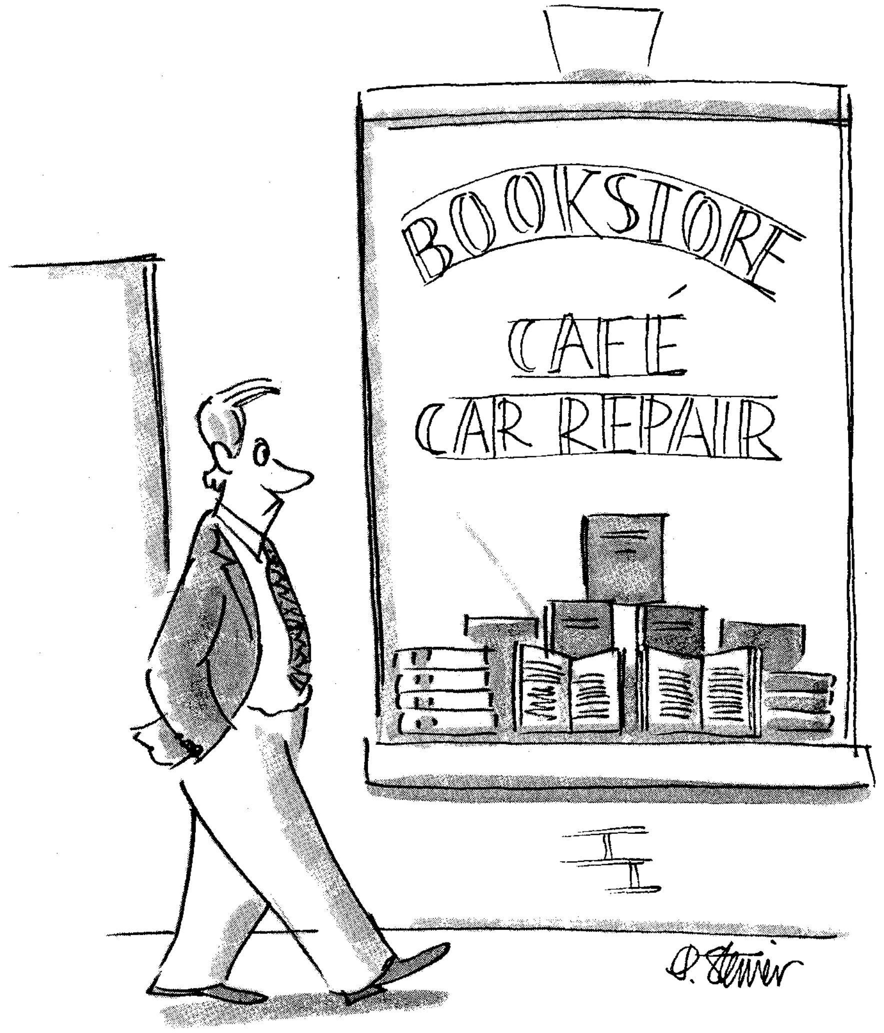
als this year. We've even joked about taking our act to the American Booksellers Association annual meeting: anything to ingratiate ourselves with—or, at least, make an impression on—booksellers. In the course of our practice sessions, I began to suspect that Jim wasn't exactly flush. He mentioned that he couldn't afford to have his piano tuned, and that, in any event, it was on loan to a friend, since he couldn't fit it into his studio apartment. Otherwise, I didn't think much about his finances; and, given Jim's nature, they are not a topic he'd ever mention. We'd sometimes eat out after our sessions, usually in modest restaurants, but once at a place that must have run forty dollars a person. Only now do I realize how that must have shattered his budget, or that he would often walk the sixty-six blocks between his apartment and mine to save the fare.

WILCOX'S first break as a writer came at Yale, when he submitted a short story to Robert Penn Warren, then on the Yale faculty, and was one of twelve students admitted to his fiction seminar. Like Warren, Wilcox hails from the South. He grew up in Hammond, Louisiana, a town of fifteen thousand, not far from Baton Rouge, where his father, James H. Wilcox, plays the French horn and headed the Music Department of Southeastern Louisiana University before he retired. At Yale, Wilcox had dabbled in theatre, at one point dancing in the aisle clad only in a fur loincloth, in an avant-garde production of Ionesco's "Rhinoceros." But Warren's book "Understanding Fiction" has been an enduring influence on Wilcox's work. He wrote several short stories for Warren's seminar and a novel as a senior thesis. Though he was awarded honors for his effort, he was disappointed that Warren showed none of his work to his agent. But Warren did recommend Wilcox to Albert Erskine, a legendary editor at Random House, who was looking for a new assistant.

Wilcox arrived for his job interview neatly dressed and well groomed—an anomaly in 1971, when shoulder-length hair and T-shirts were the norm at Yale. Erskine, a Southerner, who had also lived in Baton Rouge, later told Wilcox he had got the job because he was the only applicant with the manners to remain standing until he was invited to sit. Erskine had worked with William Faulkner and John O'Hara. He was credited with discovering Malcolm Lowry and Eudora Welty. He edited James Michener. "It made me tremble that he'd known Faulkner," Wilcox says. He was hired, at a yearly salary of seventy-five hundred dollars.

Wilcox was plunged into the world of high-end trade publishing, writing flap copy and doing line editing, and he was gradually allowed to offer more substantive criticism. James Michener, after receiving editorial comments from Wilcox on the manuscript of his best-selling novel "Centennial," sent Wilcox a letter telling him to call his travel agent. He invited Wilcox to go anywhere in Europe at Michener's expense; Wilcox chose Paris, and spent ten days there in 1974. At the other end of the publishing-income scale, Wilcox worked on novels by Cormac McCarthy, which sold only modestly. Even Erskine, Wilcox learned, could be taken to task for literary fiction that didn't sell. But Erskine stubbornly backed writers he believed in, and his stature enabled him to get away with it.

The job gave Wilcox plenty of insight into what worked and what didn't, in both the literary and the commercial sense. Much of his effort, like his editing of "The Save Your Life Diet," which became a best-seller, was hardly destined for literary seminars. He advanced from editorial assistant to associate editor at Random House, and in 1977 he moved to Doubleday as an associate editor. That meant being caught up in the swirl of agent lunches, book parties, and deal-making, and also meant rising at five-thirty to read manuscripts. "It was incredibly demanding. I had no time to write," he says. His life was at least superficially glamorous. Through Random House, he had become friends with the dashing photographer, author, and Africa enthusiast Peter Beard and was invited for a pair of weekends at Beard's house in Montauk, where he and Beard discussed Conrad and Faulkner, and he found himself mingling with celebrities. He met Catherine



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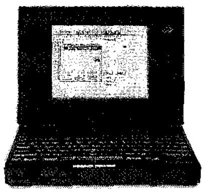

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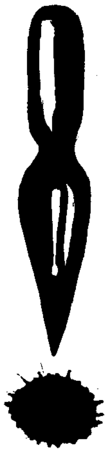
Deneuve, Terry Southern, Margaux Hemingway; he had dinner at Mick Jagger's; he came to know Andy Warhol, and Warhol's agent, Roz Cole, agreed to represent Wilcox.

In 1978, at the age of twenty-nine, Wilcox felt that time was running out. At Random House, Toni Morrison had had the office across the hall. She'd already written two novels, and she'd encouraged Wilcox to write. At Doubleday, he was further bolstered by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who also encouraged him to try writing. Though he was now making eighteen thousand dollars a year, he had no savings. He had published none of his own writing. But he knew he had to devote himself to writing full time; his efforts during nights and weekends had been both draining and unsuccessful. It took him a year to muster the courage to leave Doubleday. The first time he approached the office of the editor-in-chief, he was too nervous to go in. He circled in the hallway, mustered his courage one more time, and came back. "I couldn't go through life wondering if I could write something," he says.



In the disciplined and methodical way that is characteristic of him, Wilcox addressed himself to reducing his living expenses. He had found a twelve-by-twenty-foot studio apartment on East Twenty-fourth Street for a hundred and ninety dollars a month. It was a fourth-floor walkup and was lighted only with a bare fluorescent fixture, but the building was clean and comparatively quiet. Just then, too, he was lucky enough to sell a treatment for a screenplay he'd collaborated on with a friend from Yale. That brought in ten thousand dollars, less commissions, when it was optioned by Columbia Pictures. (It was never produced.) The money sustained him for a year.

Wilcox wrote one short story after another. He sent his manuscripts to *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Redbook*, and they were rejected everywhere. He began submitting them to smaller, less well-known outlets. "All I got was rejections," he says. When one story had made the rounds and come back, he sent off another. His money was running out. In 1980, he started typing address labels for a lawyer. He'd spread them out on his apartment floor, then organize them by Zip Code. He could tell that that upset his mother—the thought of her Yale-educated son on hands and knees fiddling with address labels.

He sent seven stories to *The New Yorker*, and all of them were rejected, but he was heartened by correspondence with one of its editors. His first letter from the editor, which accompanied the first rejection, was "an encouraging rejection," Wilcox says. "It was a thrill to get a real, typewritten letter from *The New Yorker*." In response to the second story, the editor wrote at greater length, offering criticism of the work. He also commented on each of the five ensuing submissions. Finally, after a year, the editor called Wilcox to say he was accepting a story, and the magazine would pay twenty-two hundred dollars. It seemed a fortune to Wilcox.

"Mr. Ray" appeared in the January 26, 1981, issue. "The old woman had worked hard on the 'No Smoking' sign, embellishing the stark black letters with ivy and birds and a dog she forgot to put the tail on," it began. Being published in *The New Yorker* was a milestone for Wilcox—an affirmation, of sorts—and he happily sent a copy of the magazine home to his parents. But the piece didn't exactly cause a stir in Hammond, Louisiana. "Jimmy sure has good punctuation" was one neighbor's only comment. Another, pointing to an unrelated cartoon on one page, asked, "Where did Jimmy learn to draw like that?"

"Mr. Ray" is set in the fictional town of Tula Springs, Louisiana, and that aspect of the story had drawn approving comment from the editor. After the story was accepted, but before it was published, Wilcox began a novel set in Tula Springs. He wrote the first half in six months, while living on the money from "Mr. Ray." Since Cole was no longer representing him, he offered the unfinished manuscript to another agent; after reading it, the agent said he couldn't sell it. Wilcox was discouraged, but a little later a friend read it and said it was funny. Wilcox persevered for another year, and in June of 1982 he finished the book, which he had entitled "Modern Baptists." He offered it to two more agents, and both rejected it as unsalable. Then Harriet Wasserman, an independent agent, agreed to handle it. Knopf, Simon & Schuster, and Viking all turned it down.

Rick Kot, then a young editor at the Dial Press, heard about "Modern Baptists" from another editor, who said he had read it and had hated to turn it down, but it was a comic first novel—a tough sell. Kot called Wasserman and asked for the manuscript. Though he liked it, he was cautious about publishing it. "It's always a gamble publishing a first novel," Kot says. "With a comic novel, it's an even bigger gamble. It's a marketing truism that the sense of humor is very subjective. Comedy is a very tough category. 'Modern Baptists' fitted the convention of Southern humor, but it was more serious, more ambitious." The *New Yorker* story offered confirmation that Wilcox had talent. Though Kot had concentrated on nonfiction, he offered sixty-five hundred dollars for the book, and, not surprisingly, since that was the only offer, it was accepted.

The main characters in "Modern Baptists" are Bobby Pickens (always known as Mr. Pickens), a forty-one-year-old bachelor who works at the Sonny Boy Bargain Store, and F.X., his improbably handsome half brother, who has just been released from Angola State Penitentiary after serving time for dealing cocaine at a nearby dinner-theatre-in-the-round.

At one point, Mr. Pickens, who has fallen in love with a young employee at the Bargain Store named Toinette Quaid, aspires to the cloth:

> Mr. Pickens knew that once he got his preaching diploma, he would open a church for modern Baptists, Baptists who were sick to death of hell and sin being stuffed down their gullets every Sunday. There wasn't going to be any of that old-fashioned ranting and raving in Mr. Pickens's church. *His* Baptist church would be guided by reason and logic. Everyone could drink in moderation. Everyone could dance and pet as long as they were fifteen—well, maybe sixteen or seventeen. At thirty, if you still weren't married, you could sleep with someone and it wouldn't be a sin—that is, as long as you loved that person. If you hit forty and were still single, you'd be eligible for adultery not being a sin, as long as no children's feelings got hurt and it was kept very discreet. But you still had to love and respect the person; you couldn't just do it for sex.

However, upon being spurned by Toinette Mr. Pickens finds himself

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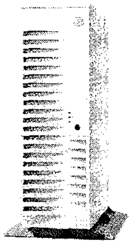

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alone with Toinette's chunky friend Burma LaSteele:

> He stood before her in his new orange bikini briefs and his matching orange undershirt. His belly button was plainly visible; the underwear was two sizes too small.
>
> "Why pretend?" Mr. Pickens said, pulling the T-shirt over his head. His white hairless chest swelled out into a sizable belly, from which Burma averted her eyes. . . .
>
> "Mr. Pickens," Burma said, turning away. "Please, get dressed. You're drunk."
>
> "This is your chance, Burma. Why blow it? You're getting old—there's gray in your hair, gray in mine. We're going to die, all of us, we're going to die miserable, unloved. I can't stand it anymore. At least one of us can be happy. You, Burma. You be happy. You deserve it more than any of us. You're good, Burma. You're a good, good woman. I can see your heart. It's pure and unselfish and good." Tears ran down his cheeks and his nose began to run. "Take it. Grab life before it passes you by." He stepped out of the briefs, and she beheld him stark naked, except for his left sock, the one with the hole in it, which he had forgotten to take off.

Kot says that "Modern Baptists" needed little editing—given Wilcox's own editing background, his manuscripts are meticulously written—but he insisted that Wilcox rewrite the ending. "He had Mr. Pickens die in a train wreck, which violates every convention of comedy," he explains. So Mr. Pickens' car runs out of gas as he tries to commit suicide by crashing into a telephone pole.

Shortly after Kot finished the editing, early in 1983, he was fired—not for signing up books like "Modern Baptists" but as part of a sweeping cost-cutting campaign that accompanied the consolidation of Dial into its owner, Doubleday. Fortunately, a surviving editor at Dial, Allen Peacock, liked "Modern Baptists" and kept it alive. The publicist for Dial was also enthusiastic about the book, and she had a good track record with reviewers. Positive blurbs were rounded up from prominent writers, including Robert Penn Warren and Brendan Gill. The book soon developed the momentum of a modest hit. In its Forecasts section, *Publishers Weekly*, the trade bible, gave "Modern Baptists" a "boxed" review—one that not only was favorable but put booksellers on notice that "Modern Baptists" could be a hit. The book was published in June, 1983. Then, in mid-July, rumor had it that Anne Tyler, a "hot" novelist on the heels of the huge success of "Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant," was reviewing the book for the *Times*. Many books are review-proof, and their publishers can afford to be indifferent to the *Times*, but literary fiction like Wilcox's lives or dies on the strength of its Sunday *Times* review.

On July 31st, on the *Book Review's* front page—the most coveted position in the book industry, one that Kot says many writers would "give their right arm for"—Tyler wrote, "Every reviewer, no doubt, has methods for marking choice passages in a book. Mine is a system of colored paper clips; yellow means *funny*. 'Modern Baptists' should be thick with yellow paper clips on every page, but it does even better than that. While I was reading it, I laughed so hard I kept forgetting my paper clips. Mr. Wilcox has real comic genius. He is a writer to make us all feel hopeful."

The review was a godsend, triggering a wave of favorable reviews, from nearly every major paper. Wilcox had a brush with celebrity when a producer for Barbara Feldon (Agent 99 of "Get Smart") called to say that Ms. Feldon might be interested in having Wilcox as a guest on her cable-TV talk show. Hollywood was said to be interested in the screen rights. It was, of course, dizzying to be the subject of so much acclaim so soon—especially for someone as modest as Wilcox. "He was thrilled, or what passes for thrilled with Jim," Kot says. "He said something like 'Oh, gosh.' " Wilcox never inquired about the size of the first printing ("I didn't want to know; I assume it was low," he says), which was five thousand copies. The book went back to press four times, and ultimately sold eleven thousand copies in hardcover. The Literary Guild optioned it. Penguin bought the paperback rights, for ten thousand dollars. It was published in the United Kingdom. For his next novel, Wasserman was able to negotiate an advance of $27,500. Dial bid on it, but Harper & Row, which had meanwhile hired Kot as an editor, outbid Dial. Wilcox dared to believe that his future as a novelist was secure. He stopped writing short stories.

Having read the first hundred pages of the new manuscript, Kot had high hopes for it. "It was a coup to get him," he says. "I saw a writer with a promising career, someone we wanted to develop. I loved his work and liked him

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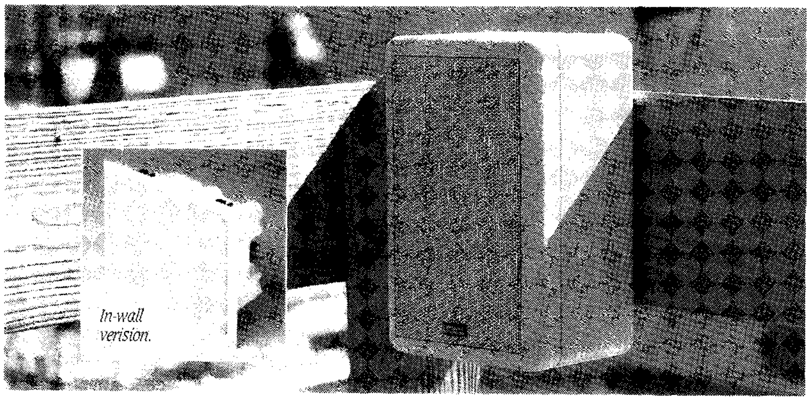
personally. Harper wanted to do more literary fiction." As it happened, literary fiction was driving what was then the hottest category in publishing—trade paperbacks. The runaway success of Jay McInerney's "Bright Lights, Big City," which was originally published in trade paperback rather than hardback, had publishers scrambling to develop their own lists of hot novels in that large-type, softcover format, which typically sold at about half the hardcover price, rather than the one-fifth to one-fourth charged for mass-market paperbacks. In the past, trade publishers had typically auctioned reprint rights to paperback publishers and split the ensuing royalties with the author; that was what had been done with "Modern Baptists." But because costs for trade paperbacks were only slightly higher than those for mass-market paperbacks, they could be profitable with even relatively modest sales. The Harper deal for Wilcox's new book included both hardcover and softcover royalties, a so-called hard-soft deal, which has now become commonplace.

Wilcox's second novel, "North Gladiola," was published in 1985. Its heroine, Ethyl Mae Coco, is the prime suspect in the murder of Tee-Tee, a chihuahua belonging to the Tula Springs beauty college—and Mrs. Coco had, in fact, once thrown a pan of lukewarm bacon grease on Tee-Tee. Kot's main concern was to build on Wilcox's audience for "Modern Baptists" and avoid the notorious "sophomore slump" that has felled numerous promising first novelists. He was quickly reassured. The novelist Bobbie Ann Mason hailed "North Gladiola" as "a scream." Reviews were again enthusiastic, though the *Times Book Review* didn't again give it the front page. There were no author tours, however, and no bookstore readings. Not every review was positive. After Harper's publicity department sent Wilcox a copy of a negative review, he asked that only positive reviews be sent him. Harper complied, but one negative review slipped through, leaving Wilcox much upset.

Ominously, sales of "North Gladiola" fell well below those for "Modern Baptists." It never came close to "earning out" the advance, as the publishers' phrase has it. Wilcox could barely bring himself to look at the royalty statement. "I'd open it and sort of squint at it," he



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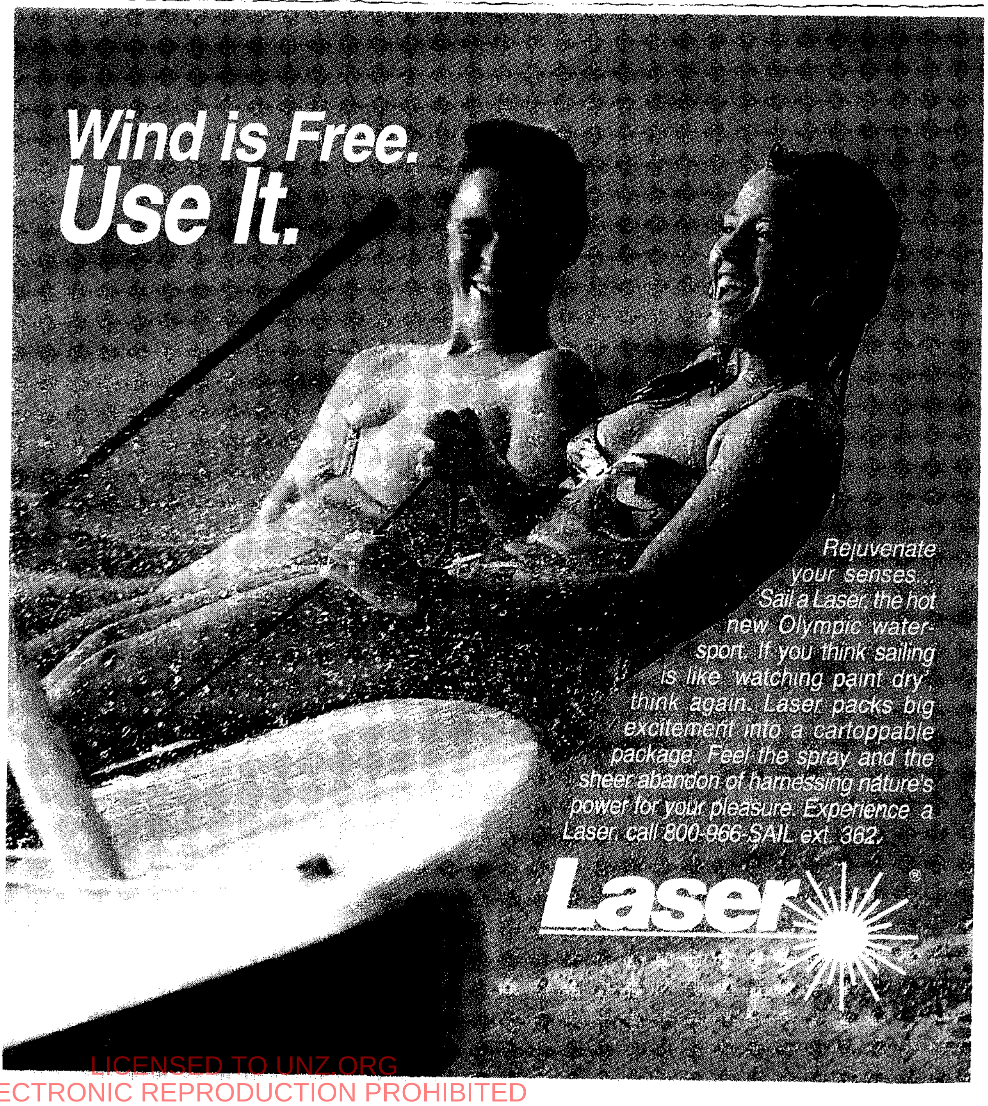

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says. "All I saw was a minus. Then I filed it away." He was concerned. "The momentum of 'Modern Baptists' was being rapidly lost," he says. Like many authors, he began to wonder if his agent—Wasserman—was the best agent for him. "A movie deal fizzled out, even though there seemed to be a lot of interest," he says. "I like and respect Harriet, but I wanted more to happen." Though it was painful, Wilcox severed his ties to Wasserman. Then he called Urban, who had been recommended by colleagues, and who had had great success with literary fiction, representing, among others, Jay McInerney and Bret Easton Ellis. Urban loved "Modern Baptists" and "North Gladiola," and agreed to represent him.

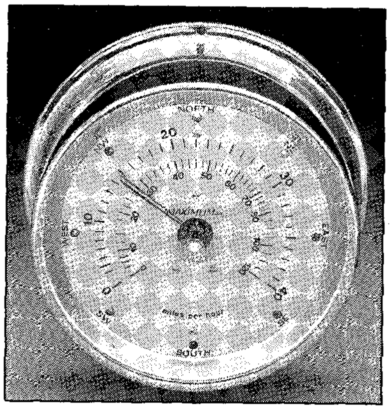
Despite the weak sales of "North Gladiola," Urban negotiated Wilcox's best deal yet—a two-book contract for seventy thousand dollars. That advance largely accounts for Wilcox's peak earnings of $48,600 in 1988. In 1987, when the first of the two manuscripts came in, "Miss Undine's Living Room," in which Olive Mackie runs for superintendent of Tula Springs' Department of Streets, Parks, and Garbage, Kot had the first serious problems he'd encountered in Wilcox's work. An ensemble of characters, none of them particularly sympathetic, flew in the face of literary convention. Kot invited Wilcox to dinner to discuss possible solutions.

"With 'Miss Undine,' Rick was very clear," Wilcox says. "After I turn in a manuscript, Rick takes me out to a nice dinner. We've been to Union Square Cafe, Bouley. It's a shame, really—the only time I get to go to these places, I'm too nervous to eat. He didn't like any of the 'Miss Undine' characters. He said there was no center."

Wilcox considered Kot's criticism. But his mild demeanor conceals a strong will. "Maybe I've read too many positive novels with wonderful characters," Wilcox says. "I've read genre fiction. I read Judith Krantz when I was at Doubleday. The main characters are always rugged and handsome if they're men and gorgeous and buxom if they're women. They have a drive to succeed, and they do succeed. They forge ahead in life. Why can't I write about more heroic characters?" He answers his own question. "I'm not a positive thinker. Southerners tend not to be. Faulkner, Welty, O'Connor—they're in the tradition of Hawthorne or Melville. There is depravity. We're not good people unless we really try. Popular fiction is Emersonian. He transcends the dark side of human nature. Self-reliance. We can become better people. I don't subscribe to this. The sense of reconciliation readers want is not that easily won. Unearned idealism usually does more harm than good. I absorbed this from Robert Penn Warren. He wrote a poem about a night flight to New York in which he thought about Emerson at thirty-eight thousand feet, the point being that at that distance from life you can indulge in Emerson's view of human perfectibility. I don't see Olive as positive or negative. We're all pretty mixed bags. Our faults are very much tied in to our virtues. Most of our lives are not weddings, funerals, and crises. We're not in a plane that's about to crash, and we're not about to launch a new line of high-fashion clothing. We mostly have routine days. We can't see where we're going. I've heard the most interesting things standing in the checkout line at Wal-Mart." Wilcox declined to make any significant changes in "Miss Undine."

Wilcox's world view may have been reinforced one evening soon after he put the finishing touches on that book. At a dinner party he attended, he bit into a piece of chicken and broke off a crown from a tooth. As he was walking home, castigating himself for having gone to a cut-rate dental clinic (his "dentist," actually a student, had received a failing grade for the crown installation), an attractive couple, walking arm in arm, approached him. They told him they had a weapon, then mugged him. In addition to his cash and credit cards, they stole his crown, which he'd carefully kept in his pocket. The new crown set him back eight hundred dollars.

Then he received a letter from the Internal Revenue Service announcing that he was being audited for his 1985 income, of $11,800. In addition to examining all of Wilcox's banking records, the auditor, obviously suspecting that Wilcox was hiding income, insisted on visiting his apartment. Wilcox deducted a third of his annual rent, because he had divided his small studio space into three areas—a sleeping area, a sitting area, and a work space. The auditor examined the table where Wilcox



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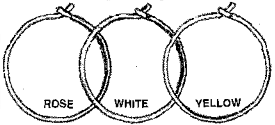

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worked—which, given the size of the apartment, was close to the refrigerator—and accused Wilcox of eating there. Wilcox said he didn't ("It's much too depressing to eat next to the typewriter"), but the auditor argued that he *could* eat there, so the area wouldn't count as an office. It also lacked a solid wall, which would have cut off his view of both windows. The auditor found no undeclared income, but did disallow Wilcox's home-office deduction, which came to four hundred dollars. "He seemed very respectful," Wilcox says of the auditor, who had admitted that this audit was his first assignment for the I.R.S. "He didn't make me feel creepy, like a tax cheat, which I guess he could have."

"Miss Undine" was published three weeks later. (A dental college figures prominently in the plot.) Some readers and reviewers have said it's their favorite among his works. The reviews were almost uniformly positive. But the influential Michiko Kakutani, in the daily *Times*, sided with Kot, noting the lack of positive characters. Sales slipped to five thousand copies.

"Sort of Rich," Wilcox's next novel, which came out in 1989, brought a New Yorker, the newly married Gretchen Dambar, to Tula Springs, which somehow reminded her of both Baroness Blixen's African farm and Parsippany, New Jersey. Kot thought it Wilcox's best work—"a close to perfect novel." In an effort to boost sales, Wilcox attended the American Booksellers Association annual meeting, in Washington, D.C., and he was featured at a Harper luncheon for literary novelists. He was also sent to bookstores for readings and did a brief tour of the South. He got a television booking on a 6 A.M. show in New Orleans. A painfully small crowd showed up for autographs in Jackson, Mississippi. The reviews were very positive. But sales slipped again.

By now, Wilcox couldn't bring himself even to open his royalty statements. "They're very depressing," he says. None of the advances had earned out since "Modern Baptists." "I'd really been hoping to earn out with 'Sort of Rich,' " he says. "I knew that the publishers were paying out more than they were making. I was doing the best I could. This isn't a good situation. I'd love them to see some benefit from all they'd done for

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me. This was hard on me. I felt they were all hoping something would happen."

Kot and Urban talked, and agreed that something had to change in order for Wilcox to "break out" from sales of fewer than five thousand hardcover copies. On the strength of the manuscript for "Sort of Rich," Urban had negotiated a new, forty-five-thousand-dollar, one-book deal. But Wilcox had now done four novels set in Tula Springs. No momentum was building. No one told Wilcox this in so many words, but when he himself suggested a change of pace from Tula Springs both Kot and Urban were enthusiastic. He decided to bring some of his characters to New York.

"I hate to be so marketing-driven," Kot says. "But we had to get a handle for Jim. The big-selling novelists, like McInerney, were tapping very specific markets. Young. Urban. David Leavitt had the first gay short story in *The New Yorker*. They were generating extra-book publicity. What could we put Jim forward as?"

Without such publicity, the once promising market for literary fiction was faltering. Nan A. Talese, who publishes literary fiction as the president of her own imprint at Doubleday, says, "There are four thousand serious book buyers in this country that you can count on for literary fiction. That's your basic number, including libraries, if there isn't a bell or a whistle, like having a very beautiful author do a tour across the country without any clothes on. That's how we're selling books these days." At the same time, the trade-paperback fiction market had become saturated. Even as hardcover sales were fading, so was the Wilcox backlist. As computers proliferated in bookstores, the Harper sales force was growing more discouraged about Wilcox's prospects. "They'd look on their computers and see that his last book only sold three, so they'd say, 'We'll only take two this time,'" Kot says. "The sales force was grumbling mildly, saying it was getting harder and harder to get his books out in stores."

Kot was enthusiastic about the new book. It had a great title, something much more contemporary—"Polite Sex." F.X., the handsome miscreant from "Modern Baptists," made a reappearance. Kot pitched the book to the sales force as "Wilcox comes to New York." For the book, he hoped for a big-

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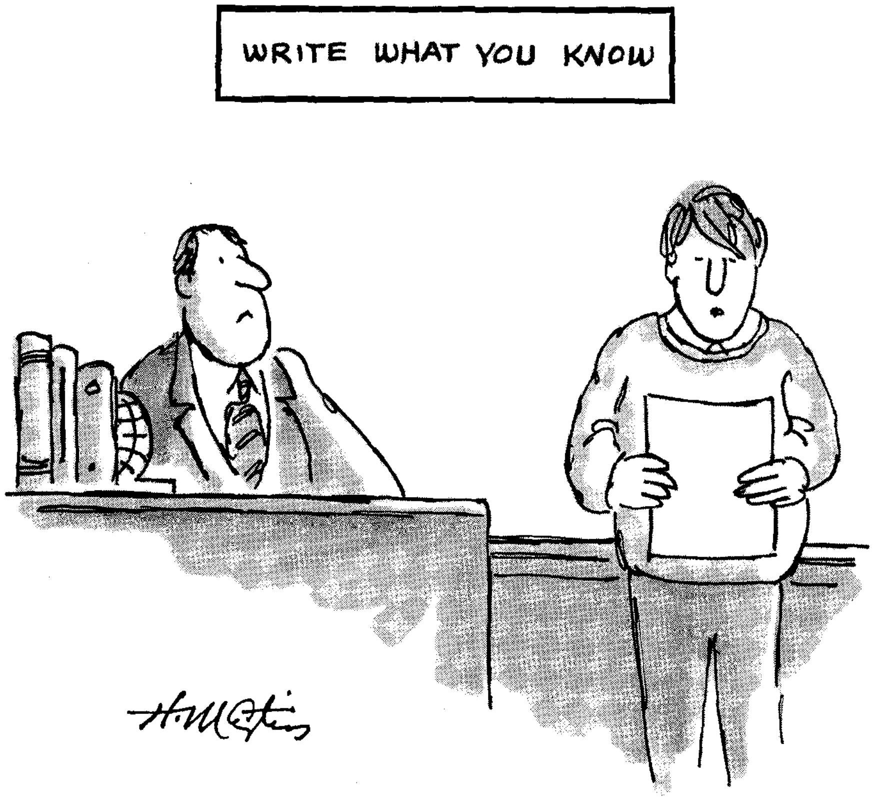

"And then I saw the shop teacher, Mr. Morgan, grab my homeroom teacher, Ms. Truslow. In a flash, he was all over her."

• •

ger urban sale. He commissioned distinctive new cover art, which won an award for graphic design. Harper managed to get seventy-five hundred copies into stores. *Time* asked for a photograph of Wilcox in anticipation of a major review.

But publication day came and went, and no major review appeared. The "news" that Wilcox had moved his setting to New York made no waves. Not only did "Polite Sex" fail to attract the urban readers Kot and Urban had hoped for but it seemed to alienate his core group of Southerners. Despite consistently favorable reviews, Wilcox's fifth book sold worse than any of the previous ones.

Kot called Urban. "I said, 'Binky, we only sold three thousand. I can't afford to pay any more. We have to be realistic." He reminded her that Harper (now HarperCollins, as a result of a merger) had kept all Wilcox's books in print, even buying backlist rights to "Modern Baptists." Kot offered twenty thousand dollars for Wilcox's next book—half his prior advance. Urban knew she couldn't sell Wilcox on the open market after the numbers on "Polite Sex," and, besides, she was not thrilled with the new book, which Wilcox was already writing. She worried—even as she remained convinced that Wilcox had the potential to produce a huge success—that his writing was becoming too serious, too inward, increasingly esoteric. Wilcox took the twenty thousand dollars, happy to be able to keep writing.

There was a quiet sense of dread about Wilcox's sixth novel, "Guest of a Sinner," which was published last year. Inspired in part by the woman with twenty-two cats he'd heard about at the soup kitchen, it is darker, more complex, than the earlier books. "After his father had swerved into a tree to avoid hitting a squirrel," one passage goes, "Eric had never once, in the fifteen years since, questioned if the squirrel's life was worth his mother's. Not out loud, at least. Mrs. Thorsen had been killed, while Lamar, properly buckled up, had survived without a scratch. Eric's mother always refused on principle to wear a seat belt, mainly because she thought it was the liberals who made its use a law, but also because it wrinkled her clothes." Kot was concerned because Eric, the main character, is less likable at the end of the story than at the beginning. And, though nothing seems forced or didactic, the book does have weighty themes of religion and faith. Worse, it proved impossible to describe the plot to the sales force, let alone give the book a marketing "handle."

"Guest" sold four thousand copies. For his latest book, Kot has offered Wilcox ten thousand dollars. "What was I going to do?" Kot asks. "I'd given it our best shot. We had to get a lower advance."

THE economics of literary fiction are stark. Consider the cost to HarperCollins of publishing "Guest." While specific numbers are closely guarded, several people with access to HarperCollins' results provided this summary. Every book has a fixed "plant cost," which covers copy editing, setting type, proofs and proofreading—about ten thousand dollars for "Guest." Added to that is the "PPB" (printing, paper, and binding), a variable cost, depending on the number printed; a press run of six thousand for "Guest" added about nine thousand dollars. Marketing expenses, which in the case of "Guest" included advertising (a one-fifth-page ad in the *Times Book Review* cost five thousand dollars), author touring, and posters, came to just over ten thousand dollars. The advance added twenty thousand dollars. And before any of these costs are covered, twenty-five per cent of gross sales goes to general overhead. Six thousand copies of "Guest," retailing at twenty dollars, would yield $57,600 in gross sales to HarperCollins (retailers and middlemen keep just over half the cover price), so a charge for general overhead would be $14,400. Thus, total costs were approximately $63,000. "Guest" yielded no subsidiary-rights revenues. (In a hard-soft deal, the paperback edition is accounted for separately.) At four thousand hardcover copies sold, "Guest" produced about $38,000 in revenue to HarperCollins, leaving a deficit of $25,000. HarperCollins aims for a fifteen-per-cent return on investment, which means that "Guest" would have had to sell more than seven thousand copies to generate the roughly $73,000 necessary to meet that standard.

Given the way that the publishing industry allocates costs—particularly the

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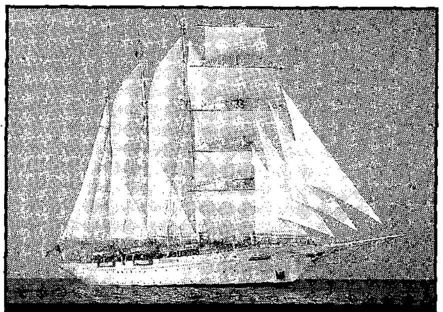

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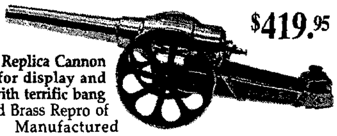

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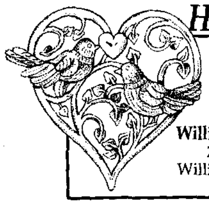

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practice of assigning an arbitrary percentage of gross sales to cover general overhead—it's easy to see the appeal of the blockbuster. A novel that sells a hundred thousand copies may never pay back its advance yet can be solidly profitable. Those are the books that generate the large revenues for general overhead, which includes, among other things, the editors' salaries.

But what about the speculative first novels that, with no author track record whatsoever, can command astronomical advances? Lately, people in the publishing industry have been buzzing about "The Day After Tomorrow," a first novel by Allan Folsom published this spring by Little, Brown, which brought a two-million-dollar advance. That money could more than sustain Wilcox for the rest of his natural life. Nan Talese explains, "The first novel that is sexy or promotable, or has just been sold to the movies, can get a huge advance, because it's something new," and she points out that "The Day After Tomorrow," the work of a Hollywood scriptwriter, had been pre-sold to the movies. "You know how Americans are about 'new.' There's no track record for the bookstores to pull up and say, 'That author only sold five thousand copies.' They see that the publisher has a lot at stake and is really going to get behind this, touring the writer, making special galleys, and so on. That's the plan." This strategy has been fuelled by the success of novels like "Damage," by Josephine Hart, and "The Secret History," by Donna Tartt, both sexy first novels with attractive authors which were enormously profitable despite large advances. "It's a very odd atmosphere," Talese says. "Publishers are willing to gamble lots of money on *something that might* hit big, but more hesitant to invest smaller sums and stay with an author as he or she builds an audience."

Who knows whether "The Day After Tomorrow" will change that thinking. A *Times* critic dismissed it, noting that "the author has a great deal to learn." The book's jacket copy claims that it "reinvents the thriller." It does not say what the book is actually about: an international conspiracy to clone Hitler from his frozen head. Although ads have touted it as a "No. 1 National Best-Seller," the book recently dropped off the *Times* best-seller list after eight weeks, never having reached the top spot.

Brand-name fiction writers remain the safest commercial bets, even though they, too, can command huge advances. Bill Shinker, who until recently was the publisher of HarperCollins, says, "You know that on a Sidney Sheldon or a Barbara Taylor Bradford there's no way in hell the advance will ever pay out. You can still make money. Those authors will sell at such a predictably high level that it will cover a lot of overhead. Wilcox is a labor of love. He's never going to pay your overhead."

But even a labor of love—and Shinker says he loves Wilcox's fiction—can't go on indefinitely. "After one or two books, we saw a pattern emerging. He wasn't alone in this. Trade paperbacks that once sold in multiples of what the book sold in hardcover were now selling half the hardcover sales. A very sad development, but we were up against it."

Even though Kot moved to Hyperion in 1993, HarperCollins did make a bid under its contract option for Wilcox's next work. It was low—seventy-five hundred dollars. "We felt we'd got into a rut with Jim," Shinker says. "I had no explanation for why the books weren't performing. He had fabulous reviews but never the sales to live up to them. The kind of fiction he was writing, there might have been a time in the sixties or seventies when he would have sold in mass-market paperback. But taste has changed. Today, multicultural, black, Hispanic, Japanese—that's the trend. The books that Jim did, as good as they are, fell through the cracks."

Shinker felt that HarperCollins had to make a bid that stood a chance of earning out. "God bless him if he goes someplace else" is what Shinker says he felt. "Maybe they'll bring a fresh eye and can do something. It's frustrating when you like somebody's work and you can't make it happen for them."

WILCOX has struggled with his current novel, in part because of the mounting pressure he feels from his publisher and his agent. After "Guest," Urban took him to lunch for a serious talk. (He can't bring himself to discuss money with Kot.) She said he had to consider his audience. "A problem with selling his books is who will buy them," she says. "That's what a bookseller asks. Literary fiction is not selling well. You need a target market. Women buy books, but his aren't women's books. It's pathetic. Why can't you just write good books? But there's too much competition for people's attention. I told him, 'We have to have something.' "

Urban's message got through. Wilcox is a great fan of the English novelist Barbara Pym, a brilliant writer of small-scale social comedy, and he is haunted by the knowledge that Pym wrote six published novels and the seventh was turned down. She spent the next sixteen years writing unpublished novels, and was rediscovered only at the end of her life, when the London *Times Literary Supplement* hailed her as one of the most underappreciated novelists of the twentieth century. Wilcox's first instinct was to go back to "Modern Baptists"; after all, it had sold reasonably well. He thought he

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might do a more comic, slapstick story of a New Yorker who returns to his Southern roots. He tried a short story in that vein, written in the first person, and sent it to *The New Yorker*. It was rejected. He tried about sixty pages of a novel, and sent them to Urban and Kot. He could tell they were cool. Urban told him it seemed forced; it wasn't funny. "I've never worked so hard starting a book," he says. "My advance was going down. It was a difficult time for me. I was very aware of the need for an audience. I don't want to be like Barbara Pym—I want to sell this to someone."

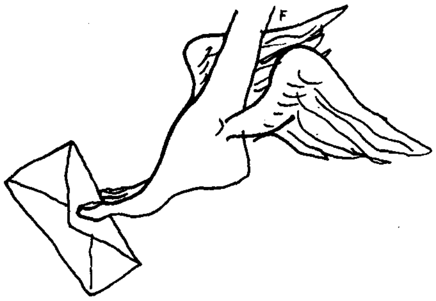
Then something new came to him. In "Guest of a Sinner," a minor character had come to terms with being gay and had begun having an affair with a garbageman. Wilcox found himself pondering the possibility of a relationship between a gay man and a straight man—not a sexual affair but a coming together on common ground of two people who didn't share the same sexuality. He mentioned this idea to Kot, who remembers Wilcox describing it as "a comic 'Death in Venice.' "

Kot was excited. "I could play this, run with this," he says. "It sounded like fun." A comic "Death in Venice" might not exactly fly off shelves, but the phrase was *something*—it was a "handle" for the sales force. Mann's classic novella had a beautiful young male character that might appeal to a gay audience, yet the novella as a whole appealed to mainstream readers and it inspired both a movie and an opera. With the Pulitzer Prize-winning "A Thousand Acres," the novelist Jane Smiley had just scored with a "King Lear" in Iowa. Was a comic "Death in Venice" any less probable? Hyperion's publicity people loved it. Urban, too, liked the idea. Kot could sell his new publisher, Hyperion, a fresh approach to Wilcox. It gave him the ammunition to outbid HarperCollins and continue editing Wilcox. Even without a finished manuscript or an outline, Hyperion committed itself to publishing it, albeit with a small advance and little money at risk. The initial contract explicitly referred to the work as "a comic updating of 'Death in Venice.' " The marketing idea was to graft a gay audience onto Wilcox's existing readers.

No one knows how large the gay book-buying audience is. Kot says that a successful nonfiction book on a gay theme can sell twenty-five thousand copies; Randy Shilts sold many more. "It's well defined," Urban says. "Publishers can market, sell, advertise to this audience. This is an audience that could support Jim's books. It has developed in the last few years. It's strong. We have to have *something*."

But Wilcox's shrinking advance has, somewhat perversely, diminished rather than heightened his commercial sensibility. "It's so little money that I'm going to write this exactly the way I want," he says now of his new book. "I feel a burden has been lifted. When I was getting the pages together, I was worried. Can Binky sell this? Now I know it's never going to be a big commercial book. In a way, I'm much happier."

The first sign that Wilcox might not play along with the new "gay" marketing scenario came when he crossed out the reference to "a comic updating of 'Death in Venice' " before signing his new contract. "This thing just got out of hand," he says. "I never said it was a comic 'Death in Venice.' I said it was a comic *reversal* of 'Death in Venice,' and even that's inappropriate. All Hollywood wants is high concept. That means you can describe it in one sentence. 'Twins' is what you get. That whole mentality has become a part of publishing. It's sold before you write it. Reviewers review the concept, not the book. That's why first novelists are getting five hundred thousand dollars. I worry about these marketing categories, trying to define things. Can't people just be people? I don't want it marketed as a gay novel. People hear 'gay' and they think 'sex.' If this were commercial, there'd be Big Sex. Well, there's no sex. None. The gay man is unattractive, a little overweight. He can't get a date. He's a Catholic." Worse, from a commercial perspective, the beautiful young man, the Tadzio of "Death in Venice," has vanished. The main characters are now aged seventy and forty-one. "Tell the sales force it's going to be 'Moby Dick' in Manhattan," he says of his new novel. "Maybe they can sell that."



WILCOX now adheres as strictly as he can to a hundred-dollar-a-week budget. He almost never buys clothes. He owns one suit, which is five years old. His blue denim shirt he bought on the sidewalk for five-ninety-nine. A blue chambray shirt was bought at a bargain store on Third Avenue. ("It's amazing the bargains you can find in Manhattan," he says.) For a while, he had a queen-sized bed, but he tired of having to turn sideways to get into the bathroom. Now he sleeps on a worn brown velour sofa bed, a friend's castoff. He has just bought a used air-conditioner. He does his own laundry (a dollar-fifty a load) and ironing. He tries not to eat out, and he never takes cabs. When he's working on early drafts of his novels at his electric typewriter, he uses non-self-correcting ribbons; he switches to the more expensive self-correcting ribbons only for the final draft. Despite all these efforts, though, he has lately had to borrow money from his parents to pay his rent, now four hundred dollars a month—something he hates to do. He has lost all confidence that his future as a novelist is secure.

The most recent advance has left Wilcox no choice but to supplement his income. Last semester, he taught a fiction-writing seminar at the Camden campus of Rutgers University. That brought in $5,700. Unfortunately, the train fare to and from Philadelphia caused him to run up fourteen hundred dollars in not yet reimbursed charges on his Visa card, which contributed to a recent cash crisis. He appeared as an extra in a Macy's television commercial for a hundred dollars. He has just completed a piece for *Allure* on the difficulties of being a handsome man. He sees it as research for a character in his new novel, and he's grateful for the assignment. The piece, if it runs, will bring in four thousand dollars, nearly half his last book advance.

There is no bitterness in Wilcox, no sense that life or the publishing industry has treated him unfairly. On the contrary, in many ways Wilcox seems to be living the life he always wanted—that of the artist. He grew up in a musical family, steeped in the lore of Mozart, the archetype of the struggling

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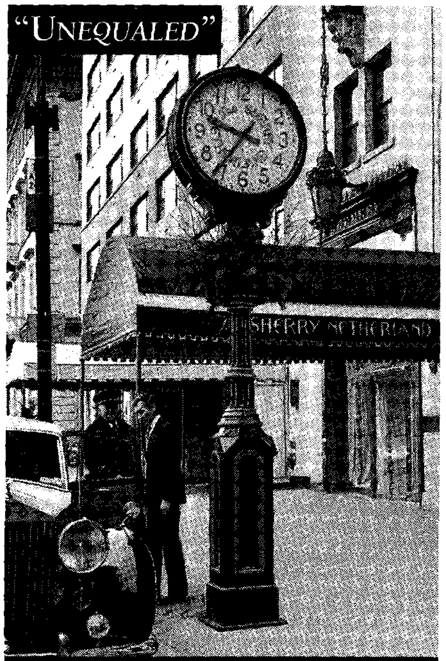

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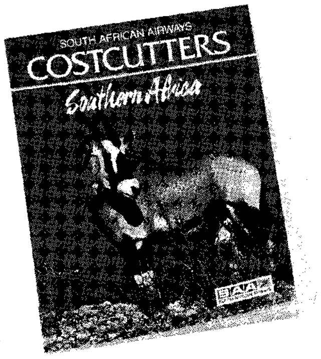
genius. "He is essentially romantic," the writer Gene Stone, a friend of Wilcox's, told me. "This is how a serious novelist is supposed to live. He may be the last of his kind in America." Yet nearly all his closest friends say they have now detected in him a worrisome level of anxiety about his financial plight. "There are days when he's frustrated and nearly in tears," Stone said, and Polly King, another friend, observed, "He lives in his own private hell of worry."

Wilcox concedes as much, yet brushes aside such concerns. "Publishing is filled with ups and downs," he says. "I know that. I feel, frankly, very fortunate to be able to write, to have the time and the means. It's almost beyond my wildest dreams. Writing a novel was the be-all and end-all for me. When I thought I could live on advances, after the Anne Tyler review, I was thrilled. Now it's going downhill, but I still feel lucky to be under contract. I'll do whatever I have to do to make money and keep writing."

Ultimately, he says, he's sustained by his readers, however small a group they may be. "Comedy is very mysterious. I'm thankful some people find what I'm doing amusing." He gets a small but steady stream of fan mail, from such improbable places as Montana and Indiana. He showed me one letter, from a reader in Canada, dated June 28, 1989:

> DEAR JAMES,
>
> It has been a day. And now I can't sleep. I am dying for a glass of lemonade but of course I have no lemons or fake stuff, even, to make it with. Instead I have a cup of iced tea which is probably unhealthy to drink at this time of night. . . .
>
> I was lying in bed trying to sleep—my husband's asleep, my coming little baby in my stomach (I'm five months pregnant) is asleep, my three cats are asleep, my old daddy, who lives in the apartment upstairs since my mom died four years ago, had another heart attack tonight—his second in two months, this one is worse, they say—and so I'm worried and thirsty and tired.
>
> Which does bring me to why I'm telling you this. . . . I'm clutching to the things that I love. And I love your books. Tonight when I couldn't sleep I thought I would read a book—so I went to my bookshelves and started scanning titles—I came to your three books which I've read at least twice each (though I don't usually do that). Anyway—please write another novel fast because I can't sleep (and even if I could I wouldn't if I had one of your books to read afresh). Is that a lot to ask? I'd do the same for you. Is it very hot where you are? My air conditioner's coming Thursday.
>
> Yours sincerely . . . ◆



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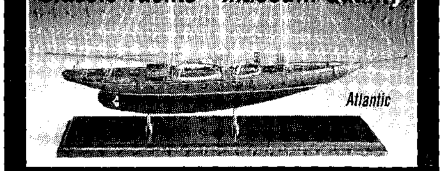

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BY NICHOLSON BAKER

FOR his book-length monograph on the early harrow, Nyle T. Milner, the agricultural historian, decided that he had to pay one more visit to the Museum of the Tractor in Harvey, New York, an inconsequential town not far from Geneva. He had already been to the Museum of the Tractor three times; each time, he left feeling that he had learned everything he needed about the rare implements of harrowage and soil pulverization in its collection, sure that his further photos and sketches would suffice. But always there was some tiny question that lured him back.

The manager of the Harvey Motel took an interest in Nyle's research and wanted him to recall his stay with pleasure; whenever he came she used a headier brand of air freshener in his room. Rather than discuss with her his preference for unflavored air, which might make her regret her earlier acts of kindness, Nyle decided that for this visit he would try to stay someplace else and hope she didn't find out.

Bill Fipton, who owned and curated the Museum of the Tractor, was at first cagey about recommending a bed-and-breakfast close by. "There is one that some people go to," he said, thoughtfully eying a 1931 Gilroy & Selvo variable-impact sod-pounder. "I don't want to dump on anyone, but I say stick with the motel." Bill, who had been quite friendly to Nyle on earlier visits, seemed cooler toward him today—he had been evasive, for instance, about which local hobbyist had done the superior restoration work on one of the more fascinating transitional Unterbey harrows. Nyle got the sense that Bill, who had a habit of doing something muscular with his tongue before he said anything, apparently to reseat his dental plate, was perhaps beginning to resent how closely Nyle was scrutinizing the collection.

"Please," Nyle insisted. "I really need to branch out."

"The Taits," said Bill reluctantly. "They'll give you a room." He gave Nyle the address. "It won't be cheap. And keep an eye open there. I've heard some stories. But they're supposed to make an interesting soup."

MRS. TAIT led Nyle up the stairs and down a narrow hall hung with three tiny black-and-white photographs of sliced mushrooms. A cotton runner, striped in purple and black, ran down the middle of the hall. She opened a door.

"This is a surprise," said Nyle, taking it all in. He gestured at a tall tubular brown vase with a single black branch gnarling artily out of it. "It's so . . . spare. I expected cutesy curtains and ruffled bed skirts."

"We are not exactly *of* Harvey," Mrs. Tait said. She was nearly fifty, with an attractive, prematurely ravaged neck and an expensive haircut. A bit of what seemed to be a tattoo, possibly the tail of something, peeped out past the unbuttoned neck of her silvery linen shirt. "But we do love the town."

"Oh, me too," said Nyle. "The tractors drew me here, as usual—where tractors are I must go! But I've grown very fond of Main Street. That sad little Chamber of Commerce."

"And what about dinner?" said Mrs. Tait.

"Do you offer a dinner package?" Nyle asked.

"We could see what we have on hand."

"I've heard high tidings of soup," Nyle said.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Tait, coming alive. "Is that what you would like?"

Nyle said he would, very much, being a soup person—if it wasn't too much trouble. Mrs. Tait left him to settle in. He took off his shoes and scattered his new farm-machinery sketches on the bed. His monograph was taking far too long to finish. Three years was excessive,

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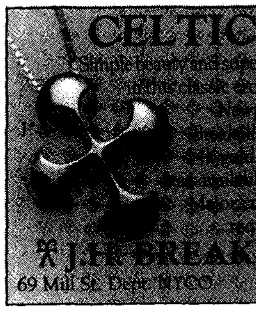

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even for a subject as far-reaching as his. Nyle was disorganized, a trait surprising in a man so short, and he was having exciting insights now about the evolution of rotary-hoe blades and diggers which he later realized were not new to him, ones that he had written down in a state of euphoria and lost in his briefcase and forgotten. So much of what he knew was only in his head, unfortunately, and his head couldn't always be depended on. Driving to Harvey, he had briefly wondered whether, were he to die suddenly, right then, he would have lived his life—not merely as an agricultural historian but even as a human being—entirely in vain. He'd seen it happen recently with the late Raymond Purty, who had known a great deal about early silos—more than anyone else on earth. When Purty was suffocated that muggy April afternoon under three tons of raw soy, everyone in Nyle's circle had expected at least a partial manuscript to come to light. But, sadly, the history of silage had all been in Ray Purty's head.

"This is the last research trip I'll make," said Nyle sternly to himself. "From now on—synthesis, exclusion, and sequential paragraphs." A faint smell of furniture wax and, underneath it, of something earthy and wholesome cheered him. This bed-and-breakfast—in a Greek Revival house with seven thin columns in front—was much better for morale than the well-intentioned instant headache of the Harvey Motel's air freshener. Maybe the town disparaged the Taits just because the Taits had taste.

The room was furnished with extreme, almost oppressive, care. The bureau was an ornamentally incised, Eastlake-style artifact with a large pair of mother-of-pearl wings inlaid in one side. The bed bore puzzling ovoid knobs, about the size of ostrich eggs, on its headboard and footboard. Five tiny safe-deposit-box keys hung next to a tarnished mirror as decoration. Nyle peered closely at the surface of the wall, fascinated by the stippled effect the Taits had achieved. They appeared to have flung or slapped around lengths of thin rope dipped in cinnamon-colored paint. Risky, Nyle felt, but it worked.

Only one pillow was made into the bed, an arrangement that momentarily

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concerned him, since he always slept with a second between his legs for comfort, having sensitive knees. But in the closet three spares were neatly shelved. Good—no need to bring up matters of ménage with the somewhat intimidating Mrs. Tait. Above the pillows, on the highest closet shelf, Nyle noticed a ziggurat of old children's games. There was a game called Mr. Ree and period Monopoly and Parcheesi boxes. And there was also—the obvious treasure of the collection—an old Mr. Potato Head kit. "Ho!" he cried, gingerly sliding it from its place on the shelf and carrying it to the bed. He had played Mr. Potato Head a few times as a child—back in the days before child safety, when you used a real baking potato and you stabbed the facial features, fitted with sharp points, into it. The joy of the old game came in imposing the stock nose- and ear- and eyepieces on the unique Gothic shape of a real potato. Man and nature in concert; "the encrustation of the mechanical upon the organic," or however it was that Bergson defined laughter. The modern Mr. Potato Head, which included an artificial base potato with holes, was, Nyle felt, a mistake—now you merely joined bought plastic to bought plastic in various fixed permutations. Why continue the affectation of a potato at all?

He pulled the lid slowly off the box, feeling the air slip in to fill the increasing volume. And then he had a nasty shock. Fully prepared for a quick, happy *poof* of nostalgia—needing it, in fact, since he was more than a little discouraged by the progress of his research—he was instead confronted by something unpleasant and even, for a moment at least, outright frightening. A real potato, or a former potato, a now dead potato, still rested within the box. The last person who had played with the set had carelessly left the face he had created inside, with its proptotic yellow eyes and enormous, red-lipped, toothy, Milton Berlesque smile still stabbed in place, and over time—how long Nyle didn't want to guess—the potato's flesh had shrunk to a wizened leer of agonized supplication or self-mockery while it had grown seven long unhealthy sprouts that had curved and wandered around their paper chamber, feeling softly for the earth hold they

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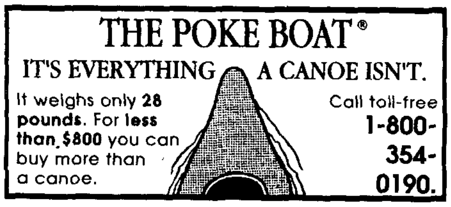
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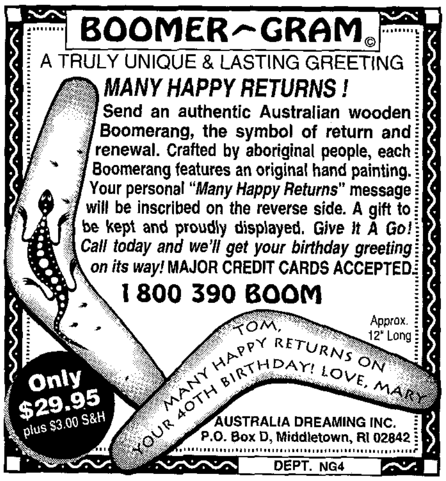
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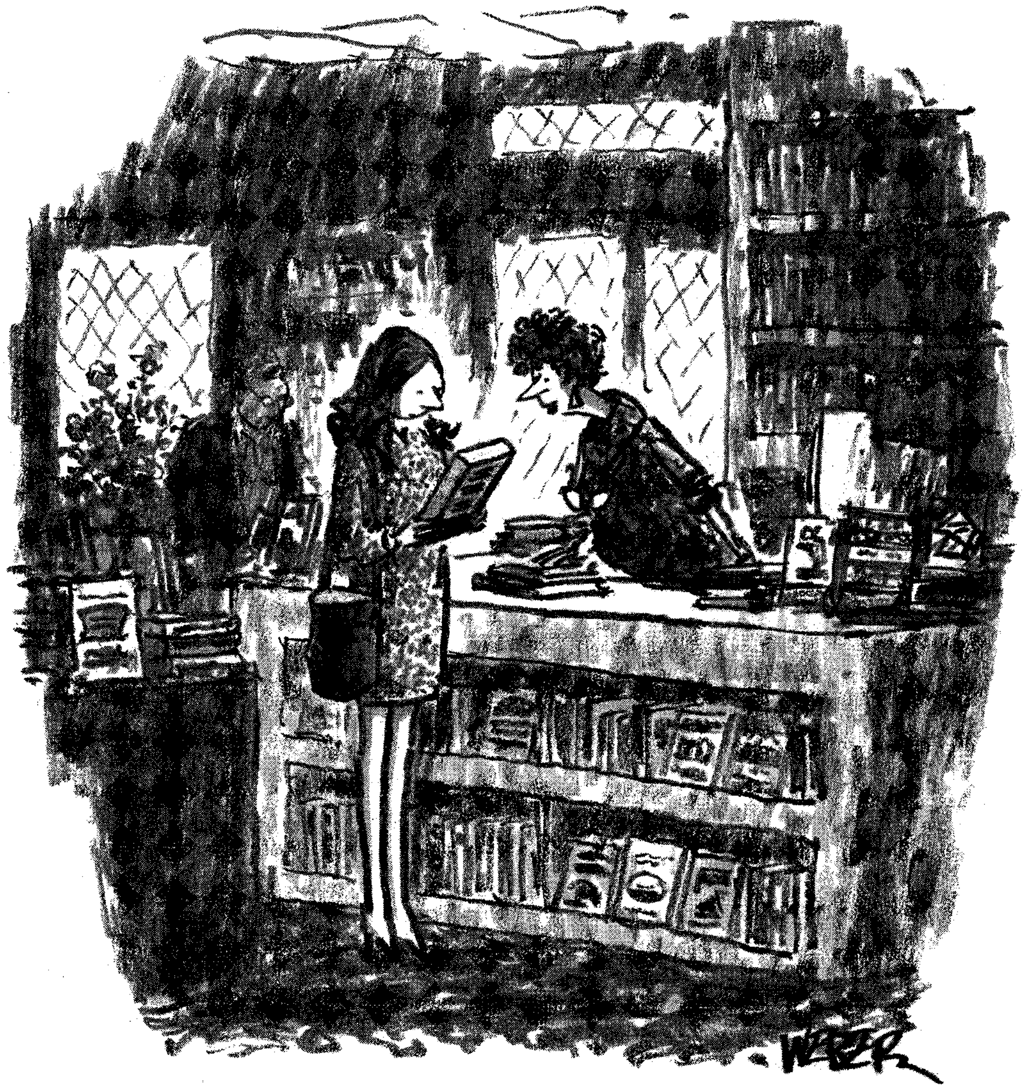

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never found. They resembled sparse hair and gastrointestinal parasites and certain weedy, wormy, albino things that live underwater; Nyle looked on them with disgust. Hurriedly he replaced the top and stuffed the box away in the closet again.

He rested for a moment on the bed, blinking regularly. The expression on the Mr. Potato Head intruded itself several times into his imagination—mummified, it had seemed, but conscious, in a state of sentient misery. The really disturbing thing was that, despite its appliqué grin and hefty comic nose, it had, Nyle felt, looked at him with a fixed intent to do him harm. The apparent animosity, though he could discount it as a trick of decomposition, bothered Nyle; he had never been hated by a potato before.

From downstairs came the cheerful eruption of a blender.

Mrs. Tait held a low green bowl over the table, waiting for Nyle to remove his politely clasped hands from the placemat. "There!" she said, giving the bowl a half turn as she positioned it in front of him. She sat down across from her husband. Mr. Tait had a carefully sculpted silver beard and wore a soft formless jacket over a black sweater with three brown buttons. The two of them were the least likely bed-and-breakfast owners Nyle had run into in a long time.

He turned his attention to his dinner. The soup had a grainy pallor, with parsley shrapnel distributed equitably throughout. "Mm, boy," he said, sniffing deeply. "Leek?"

Mrs. Tait gave him an eighteenth-century smile. "And potato."

Potato! Nyle flinched. On each of his hosts' plates were three dried apricots. "Aren't you having any?" he asked them. Mr. Tait discreetly slipped an apricot in his mouth, as if he were taking a pill, and began dismantling it with toothy care.

"We seldom eat the soup ourselves," Mrs. Tait explained. She put a light finger on her abdomen. "I would like to, but I can't. Potatoes upset me now."

"Juliette makes the soup for our guests only," said Mr. Tait. "It's labor-intensive. Please start."

"Oh, potatoes are not for everyone, that's for sure," said Nyle, his mind racing. "Especially sweet potatoes. I know five, no, more—six—people who hate sweet potatoes."

Mrs. Tait slipped a disk of apricot in her mouth and sucked on it like a cough drop. "Please start," she quietly hissed.

"Pumpkin pie's stock has plunged, don't ask me why," Nyle nattered. "I do enjoy a good boiled potato, though, especially mashed up nicely."

"Oh—you like them mashed?" said Mrs. Tait, with a distant look, as if recalling early felonies. "*Please*, won't you?"

Why was he hesitating? What reason could he possibly have for his sense of vague unease? Suppressing his doubts, the agricultural historian took a big noisy spoonful, feeling immediately juvenile, as he always did when he ate soup as a guest. "Very nice," he said.

Mrs. Tait was pleased. "We're known for it, at least within Harvey."

"I'll tell my colleagues," said Nyle.

By the time he had accepted his second bowl, Nyle's doubts and suspicions were altogether gone. And the Taits, who had been keyed up at first, seemed to relax completely as well. They drank wine and ate their dried fruits

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and asked Nyle informed questions about his field. When he determined that the term "rear-power takeoff," as applied to the tractor, was not entirely new to them, he grew animated and confessional. As he described his work, he began to think that it was—though obviously influenced (as whose could not be?) by the insights of Chatternan Gough, Paul Uselding, and M. J. French—something well worth finishing. He found himself describing to the Taits his recent fears: he sketched the story of Purty and the terrible soy suffocation, from which the history of "spouted beds" and other fermentational mechanisms might never fully recover.

"I'm feeling unusually mortal at the moment," Nyle was finally drawn to say, wiping his mouth and sitting back. His hosts were arranged in casual poses. Slightly more of Mrs. Tait's tattoo was visible: it now looked like part of a vine, perhaps, rather than like a lizard's tail. "If I were Keats," Nyle went on, "and thankfully I'm not, cough cough, I would be making every attempt to use the word 'glean' in a sonnet."

"I hope your stay here will help," said Mrs. Tait carefully.

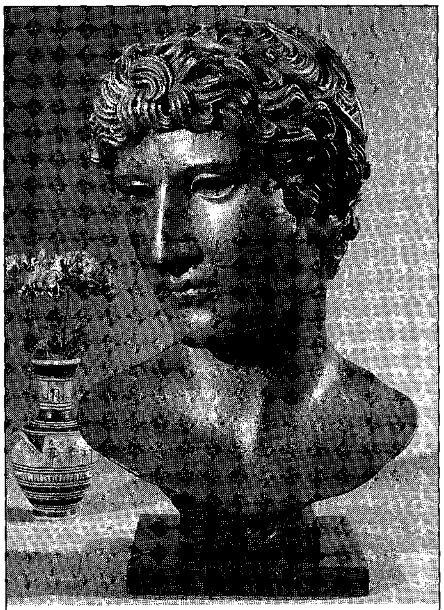
"Oh, yes. Although . . ." Hesitating briefly, Nyle decided that he would probably trust the Taits more if he just went ahead and told them. "An oddly upsetting thing happened in my room just before you called me down. I probably shouldn't have, but I took a quick peek inside the Mr. Potato Head box in the closet."

"You opened the box," said Mr. Tait, leaning forward.

"I'm a Curious George sort of person," Nyle explained. "It's the historian in me. Well—there was a highly unattractive dead potato in there. Ugh! Not good."

Mrs. Tait looked thoughtful. "Douglas Grieb was the one who saw that set last, if I remember right," she said. "He was here visiting the Museum of the Tractor, too, from the University of Somewhere—Illinois, was it, Carl?"

"Oh, Grieb," said Nyle, waving dismissively. "A controversial figure, not universally liked. Well, his potato head has not aged well. It scared the starch out of me, quite frankly."



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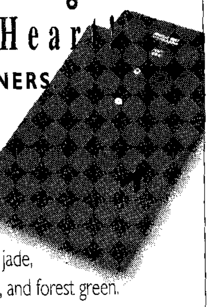

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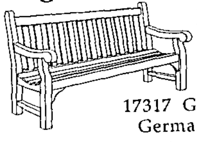

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Mrs. Tait rose and removed the plates. "Come with me," she said, and led Nyle into the green-trimmed kitchen. Two Yixing teapots in the shape of cabbages were arranged to the right of a vintage porcelain sink. Mrs. Tait bent and opened all the beautifully mitred doors to the cabinets under the counter. In the shadows were three rotating storage carrousels. Crowded on their round shelves were dozens of silent potatoes. Some were dark-brown; some were deep-red. Some had eyes that looked like bicuspids; some had sprouted and evidently had their sprouts clipped off. A few were extraordinarily large. A smell of earth and rhizomes and of things below consciousness pervaded the room.

Nyle made a whistle of amazement. Then he said, "One or two of those larger gentlemen do not look particularly . . . recent."

"The secret to a good earth-apple soup," explained Mr. Tait, squeezing his wife's arm, "is to age the ingredients."

Nyle sent his sensibility on a little stomach check and then quickly recalled it. All seemed well. "I had no idea," he said.

Mrs. Tait bent and gave one of the carrousels a turn. She leaned forward and lightly caressed a huge russet. "We eat only the fruit of a plant," she said, "and never its tuber, since its tuber is not something it intended to offer the world."

"But—" Nyle began, indicating the gleaming components of the blender which were upended in the black dish drainer. The blender blade sat drying like a blown rose. "You made the soup."

"It was our pleasure," said Mrs. Tait. "It was for you." She closed all but one of the doors to the potato cabinets and turned off the light. The only illumination in the room now came from a small bulb within the oven.

"At this time of evening, we generally watch 'Nick at Nite,' " said Mr. Tait, escorting Nyle into the front hall.

"Oh, thanks—I think I'll head on up," said Nyle. "I've got some more notes that I should expand."

"While the tractor museum is still fresh in your mind?" said Mrs. Tait.

"Exactly," said Nyle. He waved a cheerful good night to his hosts and as-

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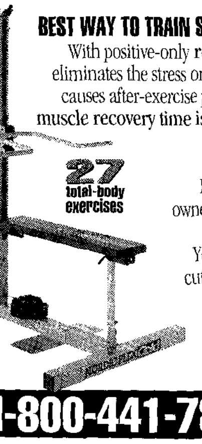

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cended the stairs, humming. But as he walked down the narrow hallway, paying no notice to the riven mushrooms, he suddenly thought, Why did Mrs. Tait use that particular word; that "fresh"? And were those—could those be—*potato prints* of some kind on the walls of his room?

NYLE had difficulty getting to sleep that night. The Taits had kindly provided some light reading on a shelf by the bed; Nyle got through a short Wilkie Collins story and half of a longer Sheridan Le Fanu. He liked being mildly frightened by fiction when he was uneasy in fact. When he turned out the light, waiting for sleep to come, he was visited by the memory of the now sinister-seeming black rectangle of the half-open kitchen cabinet downstairs. Why hadn't Mrs. Tait closed the last cabinet door? This was like trying to fall asleep after you remembered that you'd left a radio on in the basement, he thought. And the sheer size of some of the potatoes she had shown him! They were phenomenal, unnatural. *Boulders* of carbohydrate. Finally, he was able to worm his way into a fairly satisfactory half sleep by imagining himself tearing up large damp pieces of corrugated cardboard.

He woke some hours later feeling sorry for a minor engineer named Shelby Hemper Fairchild, whose career had been cut short in the early thirties by the unfortunate inhalation of a cotton ball. (Fairchild—and not Edward Lyrielle, as some wrongly asserted—developed Bleidman & Co.'s famous Guttersnipe, an erratic but groundbreaking turf flail and trencher.) Without moving, Nyle worked his unpillowed eyeball so as to take in as much of his room as he could. Moonlight furbished the brown cylindrical floor vase and its gnarled branch, as well as an aquarium bibelot in the shape of a ruined arch on his bedside table. He felt strange suspicions and recalled the kitchen cabinet. Big hostile pocked things were waiting in there. That cabinet door was open. Wouldn't it be a good idea to nip quickly downstairs and close it himself? Clearly he wasn't going to sleep properly until this state of affairs was resolved.

Pulling the pillow from between his legs, he put on his paper slippers (hospital wear, salvaged from an appendectomy performed several years earlier) and made his way in the half-light toward the door—where he discovered something. A long, glimmering white sprout, with violet accents—a lengthy potato sprout, by all indications—had grown through the keyhole. It curved motionlessly to the floor. Perplexed, on the verge of being horrified, he glanced at his watch, more to steady himself than to check the time. The notion that this sprout had grown its way out of the kitchen cabinet, originating in one of those prodigies of mass storage downstairs, and that it had then worked its way slowly up to him, all while he slept, disturbed Nyle exceedingly. His watch claimed that it was almost three.

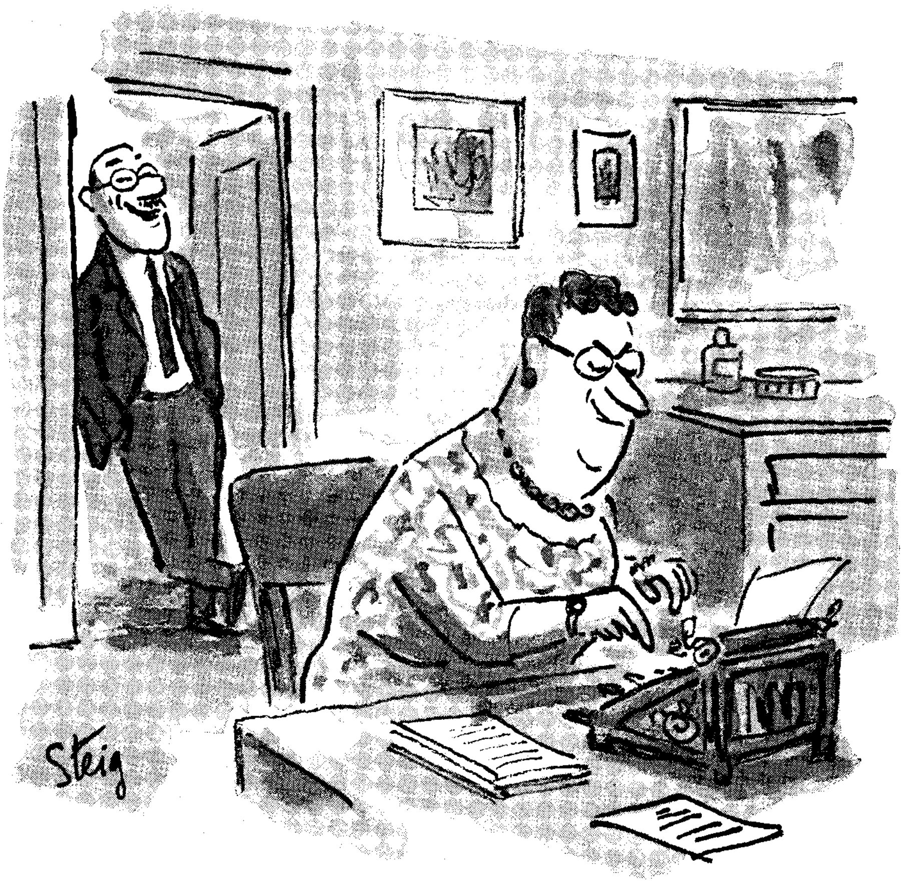
"Hello?" he called softly, in case someone or something was on the other side of the door. There was no answer.

Closer up, the feeler appeared harmless. He touched it quickly, testingly. It was cold and didn't move. He grasped it; he wound it around his trembling finger. He pulled.

The soft, unchlorophylled plant flesh gave way against the metal edge of the keyhole, making a tiny rending sound. Carefully Nyle fed the broken mystery frond back out under the doorway. "Out you go," he whispered. He waited for some time, listening. We have scotched the snake, not killed it, he thought to himself, drawing comfort from the scrap of pentameter—and then, reminded that he had some Scotch Tape in his briefcase, he carefully sealed the keyhole. The sensation of the sticky tape on his fingers left him feeling almost brave. It was time to confront the hall.

He turned the knob and peered tentatively out. The long, pale petitioner with the torn end receded kinklessly from his doorway into the shadows along the black-and-purple runner. Nyle tiptoed along it to the head of the stairway and looked down, craning his neck to determine the shoot's route up the stairs. What he then saw, as his gaze penetrated the grainy obscurity of the front hall, made a terror gong go off in his mind.

A dozen or more sinuous emissaries from the kitchen, similar to the first, were just turning the corner from the



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dining room and beginning the climb toward him.

"Good gravy!" he gasped, hotfooting it back to his room. "They're out to get me!" He slid the bolt and tried to think. The proliferating sprouts, though he suspected that they were up to no good, were none too strong, judging by the one that he had held. They couldn't push their way past the taped-up keyhole. But he had to take reasonable measures to protect himself. If he stuffed something *under* the door, he theorized, these hellish hawsers would never find him.

He took off his pajama bottoms and wedged them into the space between the door and the floor. Immediately he felt much better. No, they were not strong sprouts. They were not robust. They were attenuated and colorless and slow and soft. That was what he didn't like about them, in fact. That and that they seemed, in their blind, tentative way, to want to find him.

Ten minutes went by. Twelve. Nyle craved to know how fast they were growing, if they were growing at all. Maybe they had withdrawn. Were they already at the top of the stairs? Did they grow only while he slept? In that case, he had but to stay awake all night. A watched pot never boils. Or were they already nudging gently against the pajama-bottom buffer—and, if so, would such insistent pushings finally dislodge it entirely? He wheeled around, looking for some backup. A *drawer*. One of the heavy lower drawers from the big ornamental bureau. He seized its two handles and pulled.

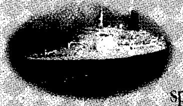
Again he heard a soft rending sound, louder this time. The drawer was not empty. Inside was a plastic sack of enormous aging Valley Star potatoes, the biggest Nyle had ever seen. Through the ventilation holes of the plastic had grown a horror whorl of intertwining white shoots and root hairs. Some of the shoots bore new radish-size dark tubers. The upper surface of the conjoined growth was flat, like a Jackson Pollock, having encountered the plane of the drawer above. Freed and slightly injured, the bureau's brood now began to awaken. Nyle stared for an instant at their sullen stirrings. Then he reverse-salaamed, barking once with shock and revulsion. When he moved, his anklebone made contact with something more yielding than an electrical cord. He glanced down. A gap in the baseboard molding had allowed entrance to more questing feelers from downstairs. There seemed to be some wispy activity at the window. Something was floating up through a loose floorboard. Nyle stamped on the board, severing the fiendish sucker. Grabbing his briefcase, he backed slowly across the room. "Mr. and Mrs. Tait?" he quavered. But there was no answer.

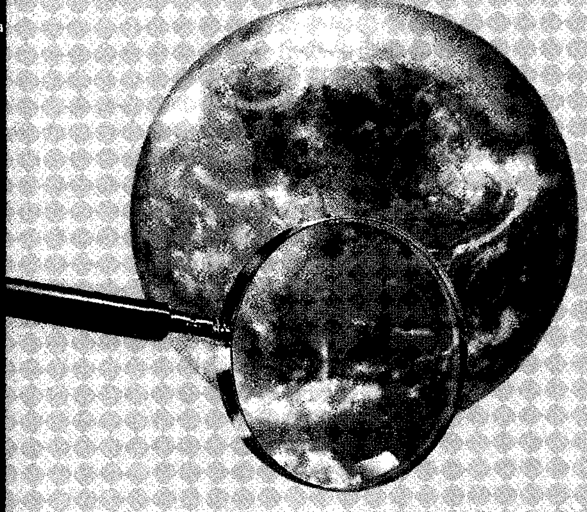
Sensing his movements and his noise, the sallow stolons began a languorous, low creep toward him. He could see them move now. "No! You're disgusting!" he cried, flicking at them with his fingers. His back bumped against the closet door. I'm doomed, he thought. And yet maybe they feared light. If he could get in the closet and turn on the closet light, maybe they would rethink and withdraw.

He bumbled inside and shut the door. He yanked on the light cord, which sprang away from his hand. A coruscation of bulb yellow filled the space. He waited, squinting, wishing he were wearing his pajama bottoms. A minute or two passed, and he began to think he was safe. And then he heard sounds from the room: his overnight bag seemed to be on the move; softnesses were sweeping the walls. He spotted the tips of three or four lissome elongations peeping under the door. With a terrified, saliva-rich curse, he grabbed a dark-green rubber boot and began pounding their growth tips as they emerged. But the light seemed to stimulate them, and many now vied for entrance. Was there no escape? He looked up. Past the light bulb, which was mounted on the wall, he saw a trapdoor. It must lead to an attic space. He could climb up there, kick out an attic window, climb out onto the porch roof, shimmy down one of the front columns, and run.

He grabbed two clothes hooks and started to hoist himself up toward the closet ceiling. His eyes drew even with the top shelf. From inside the Mr. Potato Head box came a leisurely scrabbling. Its top began to lift. The Parcheesi game slid to one side. The Monopoly game tumbled. The fixed orange eyes of the dead and shrunken Mr. Potato Head appeared from under the rising top, and then one or two—four, *seven*—limply questing spud spawn veered into the air toward Nyle's face, root hairs aquiver.

"Help!" Nyle wailed, and he fell. The floor of the closet was asquirm. Whitish-purple growth enveloped him. He waved his arms and plucked at himself hectically, but the soil-starved delvers were persistent. When they touched his face, he began to feel sad that he would never finish his history of the harrow. A sprout grew smoothly into his right knee, seeking his synovial fluid. Several more penetrated his elbows. These hurt quite a lot, though not nearly as much as the one that found its way into his urethra. One wan ganglion discovered his ear canal, and another a tear duct, and Nyle began to hear only the dim, low pulsation of plant hormones and potato ideology. Let it go, he thought. Let it all go. They found the routes his blood took, and they followed these deeper; by dawn they had





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grown the fresh, lumpy tuber that burst his heart.

WHAT once was Nyle woke in a very dark place. Many Krebs cycles had passed; many more would pass. He felt himself being slowly turned. His fellows were dozing by the dozen near him. A child's voice was saying, "That one! That big one!" He was lifted and cradled in the child's gentle hand. His vision wasn't working properly—he saw several different views of the world. The child, with a cry of happiness, plunged the fake nose into Nyle's crisp body flesh. Nyle screamed, but it was a potato scream, below the hearing of all but tree stumps and extinct volcanoes. The child stabbed in the orange pop eyes, and then the big red smiley mouth, and the little black pipe. Each face piece had points. The child wasn't quite sure what it wanted; it rearranged the Potato Head features several times. Nyle leaked a little from his puncture wounds. The child grew bored and put Nyle back in the box, tossing the unused face parts in after. Then there was a long, dark time.

He felt himself shrinking, and the shrinking was agony. He forgot what he had known, he began to know only what potatoes know. He sensed the changes of geothermic pressure; he heard the earth's slow resentments. He exhausted himself doing the only thing he could do, which was trying to send out underground shoots to form more potatoes like himself—but the shoots were hindered by a dry, smooth plant product that Nyle dimly remembered as cardboard. Nyle's face collapsed and partially liquefied—an uncomfortable process he did not soon wish to repeat. As moon followed moon he felt long-suffering, and then he forgot how to feel long-suffering and began to feel a crude, incurious misanthropy. When his dark chamber moved, and when suddenly, tumbling, he was swarmed with light prickles that reached down to the few places in his starchy interior that still lived, he made out a looming human face and saw it recoil. There was an exclamation of fear, which pleased him. "It's vile!" he heard the face say. *Ah*, soundlessly chuckled the thing that was once Nyle, *it's another historian of agricultural technology*. Emboldened by the fresher air, he readied his pale tentacles for the final gleaning, waiting for nightfall. ♦

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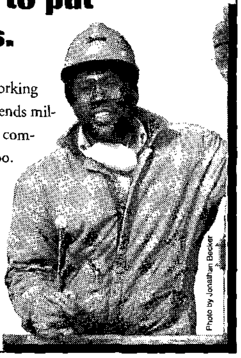
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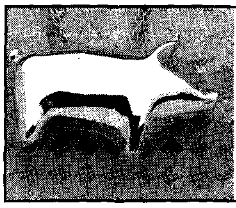
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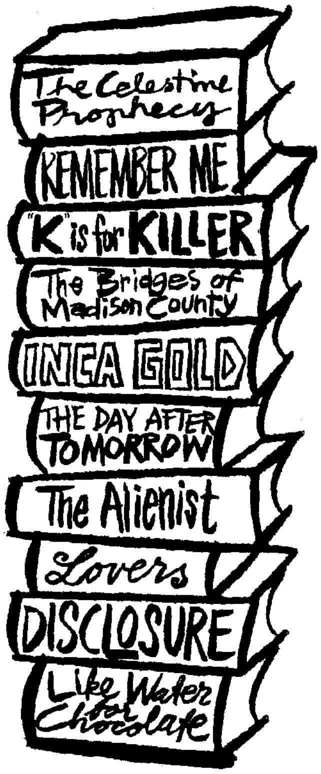
THE PUBLISHING WORLD

THE TOP TEN

Why read the best-selling fiction list? It's a barometer of where the culture stands—and it offers some real surprises.

BY ANTHONY LANE

GORE VIDAL once wrote a celebrated essay with a very plain title: "The Top Ten Best Sellers According to the Sunday *New York Times* as of January 7, 1973." He had a high old time. He got to read Mary Renault, which he loved, and Solzhenitsyn, which he did not. He dropped a brace of Vidal smart bombs—phrases such as "I once wrote the screenplay" and "when my father was in the Administration." And he argued that the art of fiction was thoroughly, and perhaps irreparably, infected by the art of film. People were writing novels to remind us of old movies, and structuring them along the sleek lines of a good script. Within a few years of Vidal's essay, Hollywood proved his point, turning several of the books that he had pondered—"The Eiger Sanction," "The Odessa File," "Semi-Tough"—into motion pictures: back to the womb, as it were, from which they sprang. There was even a birdbrained screen version of "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," which a friend of mine, ignoring all warnings, paid to see. A fortnight later, he was sitting up and back on solids, but it was a close thing.



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And now it is Sunday, May 15, 1994. What is the news from the front line of the bookstores? Two decades after the Vidal survey, has anything changed? Well, Solzhenitsyn has gone back to Russia, and Mary Renault has died, and Frederick Forsyth is no longer in the top ten. He is, in fact, at No. 14, with a novel unwisely named "The Fist of God." When he devised the title, it must have sounded crunchy and apocalyptic. Now it sounds like a club down in the West Village that you can't get into without a dog collar. I was grateful not to find Forsyth on my list, and nearly cried with relief on discovering that I had beaten the publication of the new John Grisham by a mere eleven days. There were some contenders, however, whom I was sorry to lose—steady players who had tasted the big time for a while and then dropped out. Spare a thought for Dave Wolverton, author of "The Courtship of Princess Leia," the latest supernovel in the "Star Wars" sequence. "His special talent is creating fully realized characters who live in worlds utterly different from our own," the blurb says, adding helpfully, "He lives with his family in Utah." May the force be with you, Dave.

There are sound reasons for musing on this stuff. It is easy to brush aside best-seller charts as the product of hype and habit, but they are a real presence in the land of letters, generating as much interest as they reflect. And if they do, to an extent, represent the lowest common denominator of the print culture, this only strengthens our need to pay attention, since where else is that culture common at all? 'Twas ever thus: anyone who imagines that a hundred years ago Americans were rushing out to buy the new Henry James is kidding himself. The editors of the *Times Book Review* would like to believe that they bring readers together beneath an umbrella of civilized discourse; but outside it is raining Danielle Steel, and the

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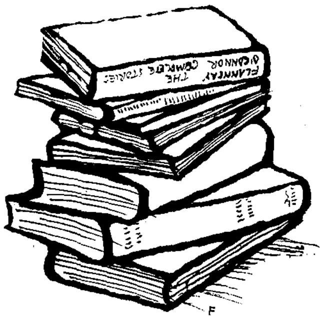

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rest of the country is drinking it in. This is nothing to be ashamed of; it is a proper corrective to our historical arrogance, the conviction that the best writings of our time will, shored up by our plaudits, both outlive us and represent us in centuries to come. But they won't; we may not even have clocked the real thing when it passed before our eyes. That is why the ideal literary diet consists of trash and classics: all that has survived, and all that has no reason to survive—books you can read without thinking, and books you have to read if you want to think at all. In between is the twilight zone, the marshes of the middlebrow, where serious novelists lumber around with too many ideas on their back, ignoring the calls of the auditory imagination. I am not trying to be difficult when I say that, sentence for sentence, there is more going on in a page of George Higgins or Thomas Harris than in a whole chapter of, say, Margaret Drabble. They have a better ear for what we say, or try to say, or don't notice we're saying—for the small ways in which the mind works and stumbles. They have fun with the truth. There is no excuse for a boring pulp novelist, but a good one somehow plugs into the grid of our speech, into the power surge of ordinary fantasies, with a jolt that would knock more delicate writers across the room. That is why we should turn to the *Times* list every Sunday morning. If the language is still alive down at this end of the market—if there is juice running through the art of basic narrative—then we have no cause to be downhearted. Conversely, if the list is crammed with John Grisham, then we can all go out to brunch and rue the decline of the West.

A place on the list, in any case, brings many things: honor and glory, and buckets of cash, and the burden of responsibility. How do the chosen few shape up? First in line, at No. 10, is **Like Water for Chocolate** (Doubleday; $17.50), by the Mexican author Laura Esquivel, which has been on the best-seller list for fifty-seven weeks. According to the Vidal theory, such wondrous staying power might be explained by the success of the accompanying movie. But the film is a far slighter piece of work, and its appeal has certainly died down by now, while the book is still going strong. It is set on a ranch run by women, among them the luscious Tita, who, condemned to a life of spinsterhood, sees her only love mar-

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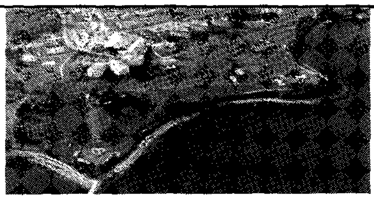

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ried off to an elder sister. The saving grace of this otherwise callow book, the spring that keeps it tense, is that it becomes both a study in frustration and a compendium of pleasures. Forced underground, physical desire keeps welling up elsewhere, most notably in the kitchen: the novel steams with elaborate foods, and Esquivel, in her sharpest coup, prefaces each chapter with a different recipe. Mexican readers fell on this book avidly, it seems, although its subsequent global triumph should surely give them pause; the main effect, after all, has been to perpetuate the myth of their homeland as lust-ridden, superstitious, and amusingly spicy. Whether you like the book depends largely on your appetite for second-generation magic realism: the shocking inspirations of, say, García Márquez reduced to familiar trappings—a river of tears, an imperious ghost, a bedspread that covers three hectares. Esquivel takes a shortcut to the magic without going via the real, and it's too easy a ride. The cream fritters sounded pretty good, though.

And so to No. 9, **Disclosure** (Knopf; $24), by Michael Crichton. This is what might be called an issue novel, something of a Crichton specialty. In his last two books, "Jurassic Park" and "Rising Sun," the issues raised were, respectively, "Look out! Raptors!" and "Look out! Japs!" The new one is intended as a thoughtful, provocative, and altogether serious investigation of sexual harassment. In other words: "Look out! Women!" You can almost hear the *ping* inside the Crichton brain as the bright idea came to him: not just sexual harassment but sexual harassment with a twist, where the harassing is done by—you guessed it—a woman. Enter Meredith Johnson, the new vice-president of DigiCom, hard drive incarnate: "We are talking about platform-independent RISC processors supported by 32-bit color active-matrix displays and portable hard copy at 1200 DPI and wireless networking in both LAN and WAN configurations." By the end of her first day, she has invited her old flame Tom Sanders up to her office. ("You still partial to dry chardonnay?") Before he knows what hit him, she has his pants open and is preparing to do it in both LAN and WAN configurations. Tom runs scared, her wrath still ringing in his ears. Game on.

"Disclosure" is Jacqueline Susann

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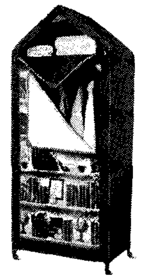

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dressed up as modern sexual politics. No doubt Crichton decided that by reversing the roles (a dicey move in itself, implying that harassment by women is not just morally but statistically equivalent to harassment by men) he would be freshening the debate. In the event, it merely makes you wonder what turns him on: whether he just enjoys writing about women like Meredith Johnson—T. rex in sling-backs. The book, full of its own bravado, muscles into some crowded ethical areas, but there's something timid and square about the whole enterprise. How's this for a hot couch scene: "He had the feeling as he lay on his back that he was somehow agreeing to a situation that he did not understand fully"? Classic Crichton—human desire expressed in the language of the memo—and a fair summary of his own predicament. The novel comes alive only twice: once for legal sparring, once for a trip on a virtual-reality headset. It should look spiffy on the big screen.

A word of advice for Michael Crichton: Try reading Judith Krantz. She's just ahead of you on the best-seller list, at No. 8, and she's everything you're not. **Lovers** (Crown; $23) is a know-nothing, fly-anywhere kind of book, and after the stale air of "Disclosure" it's like a breath of fresh Chanel. In her glitzy way, Krantz is actually more honest and upfront about the give-and-take of sexual power play than the earnestly troubled Crichton. The characters make poor old Meredith Johnson look like St. Teresa of Avila; they insist on enjoying themselves, and each other, with a gluttony that one can hardly begrudge them, although I was a little worried about our heroine, Gigi Orsini, as she lay in bed at the start of Chapter 4, "whiffing up the complicated infusion, the utterly satisfactory soup of masculinity that was particular to Zach." But Zach, whose name suggests he would be happier in a Dave Wolverton novel, is merely the warmup act for the next big attraction, David: "David smiled for the first time and now plunged freely, over and over, the diver liberated from judgment, immersed himself in the living depths of her until he quickly pounded to his own superb release." Always nice to see two young people getting on well.

This was my first visit to Krantzland, and I relished the occasion. Things were looking good right from the inside flap,

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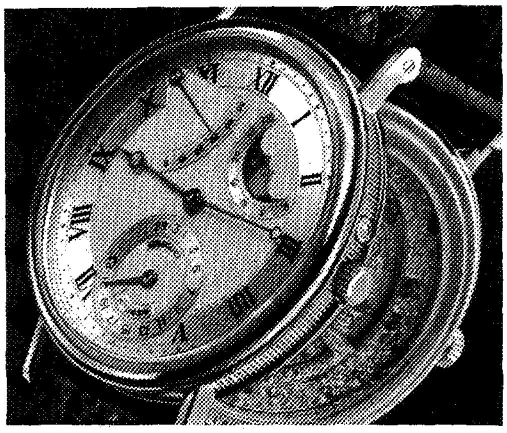
where the novel is described as a "distillation of purest Krantz." I liked the sound of this; just imagine all the Krantz motifs boiled down to one essential haiku:

> A millionaire
> Smiling at a girl with bra-
> Less breasts and jet lag.

Sadly, it was not to be. Once La Krantz gets the bit between her teeth, she's impossible to halt, and four hundred and seventy foam-flecked pages later I was lying there wiped out. The astonishing thing is that, with seven breakneck novels already behind her, this woman should still be in such a *hurry*. Characters are tumbled in and out of bed without a qualm, of course, yet the haste goes beyond that; no other writer could leave the plot on hold for two complete chapters, take a detour through the erotic history of a minor character, then swing back into line as if nothing had happened. But Krantz gets away with it. She takes us to the heart of trash appeal: she gives people space, and credit, for their preposterous dreams. She is perfectly at ease with the manner in which her heroine chooses to live, and this in turn allows readers a clear, conscience-free view of their own cravings in action; more artful novelists tend to be less generous—their disenchantment spreads like a stain, and the public feels dirty for desiring. The prose of Anita Brookner, for instance, as sad and tidy as a suitcase on a single bed, tells you that ideals are there to be missed; Judith Krantz springs the catch and brings out everything you could possibly want, and more. Hence her game efforts to squeeze twice as much information into a single sentence as it was designed to bear: "Did his cousin Billy Winthrop also take a pair of bodyguards with her wherever she went, Ben Winthrop asked himself in mild surprise as he leaned out of his car to give his name to the guard at the gatehouse that stood squarely at the driveway entrance to Billy's estate in Holmby Hills." Well, did she? Sometimes the strain is simply too much, and the syntax wilts before your eyes; take, for example, the woman who could reach her apartment "without seeing anybody or being seen, except by a stray unspeaking neighbor, all of whom were far older than she." The story of "Lovers" (fashion, film stars, Venice: the usual) is of no consequence; what matters here, and what keeps Judith Krantz at the peak of her profession, is her ability to



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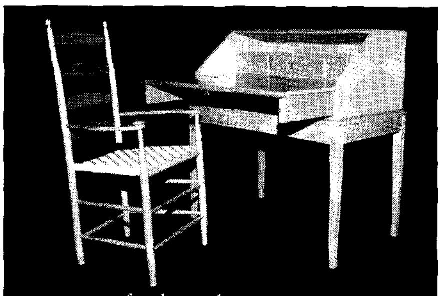

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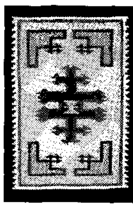

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No. 7 poses a problem. **The Alienist** (Random House; $22), by Caleb Carr, is a good book. A *really* good book, swift and dense—popular entertainment that brushes important questions with its fingertips. The problem, therefore, concerns the best-seller list itself: there must be people who go out and buy these books *because* they are on the list—who get the Michael Crichton and the new John Grisham as well as the Caleb Carr. If so, don't they notice the difference? Maybe it doesn't work like that; maybe "The Alienist" has nourished a clique of discerning admirers all by itself. It deserves them.

The time is 1896, the horse urine is freezing on the streets of New York, and the police commissioner is Theodore Roosevelt. Right from the start, Carr—a military and political historian by trade—shuffles real figures into his fictional deck. The presiding genius of the novel, Dr. Laszlo Kreizler, is an invention, but not pure invention; when we learn that he was the preferred intellectual sparring partner of William James, he comes alive in our hands. Kreizler is a forensic psychologist, or, as such men were called at the time, an alienist. Carr knows just how suggestive the word is; it feeds into his brilliant apprehension of the city—brash, stinking, and secretive New York, afraid to confront itself as it turns the corner of the century. There is a killer at work, scooping the eyes from young boys. Kreizler is on the case, hindered by authority but helped by our eager narrator, John Moore. The book is openly indebted to Conan Doyle, of course, and also to "The Silence of the Lambs," but it breathes a clammy atmosphere of its own making, a compound of the scholarly and the macabre: "It is, I believe, the preserved *remnants of a human heart.*" The characters are present at the infancy of useful sciences—dactyloscopy, say, otherwise known as fingerprinting—but they also, in a wonderful touch, get excited by duds: the notion, for instance, that the eyes of a dead man preserve his final sight. Caleb Carr has done his homework, and, more crucially, he has galvanized it to create a drama. I could have done with one more twist at the end, but that's just greed. "The Alienist" makes you hungry for more.

No. 6, on the other hand, leaves you pleading for less. **The Day After Tomorrow** (Little, Brown; $24.95), by Allan Folsom, is a new recruit to a genre that I hoped had become extinct. How come tales of international right-wing conspiracy always manage to be hugely complicated and dismally small-minded at the same time? The plot is only a few

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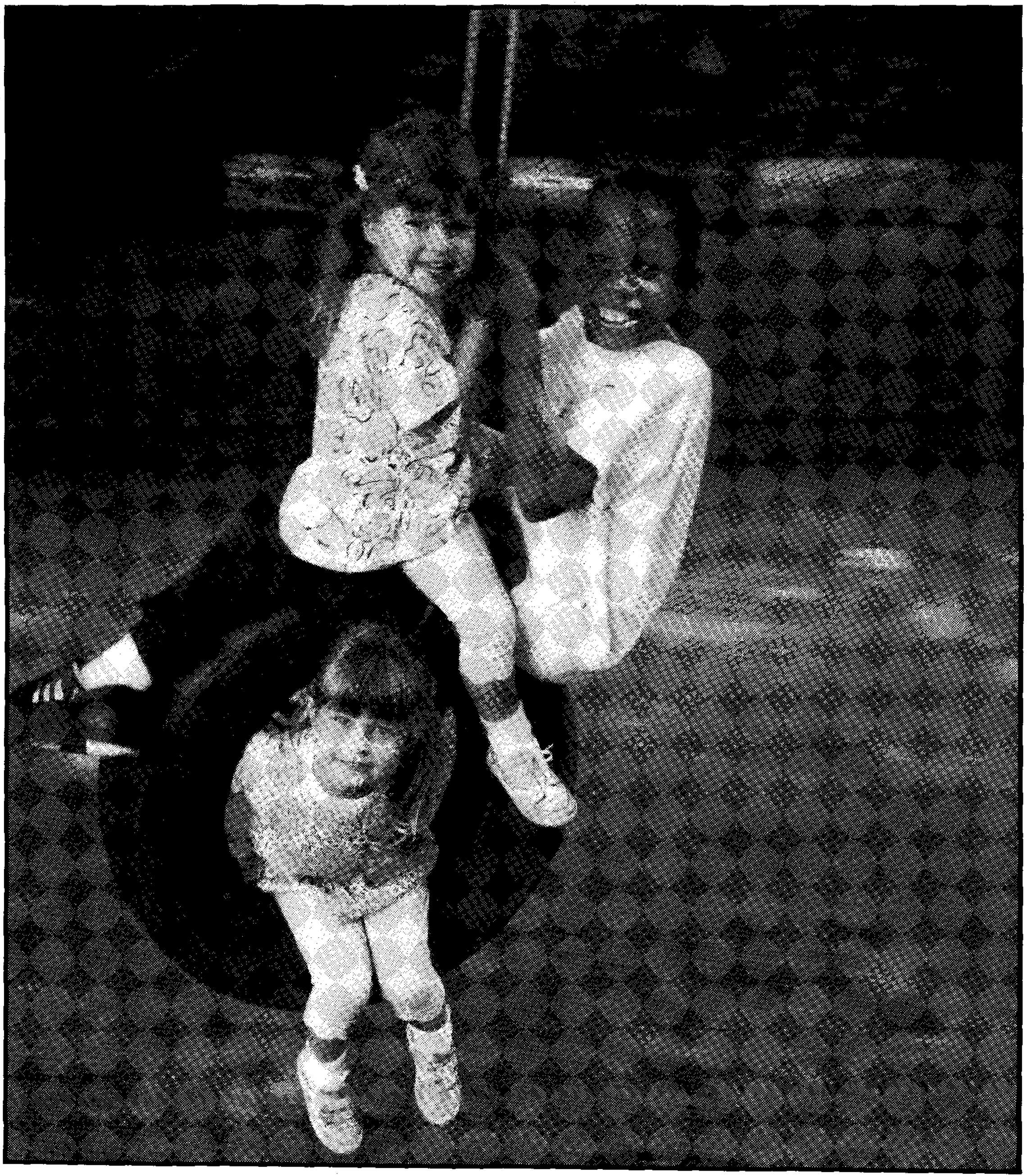

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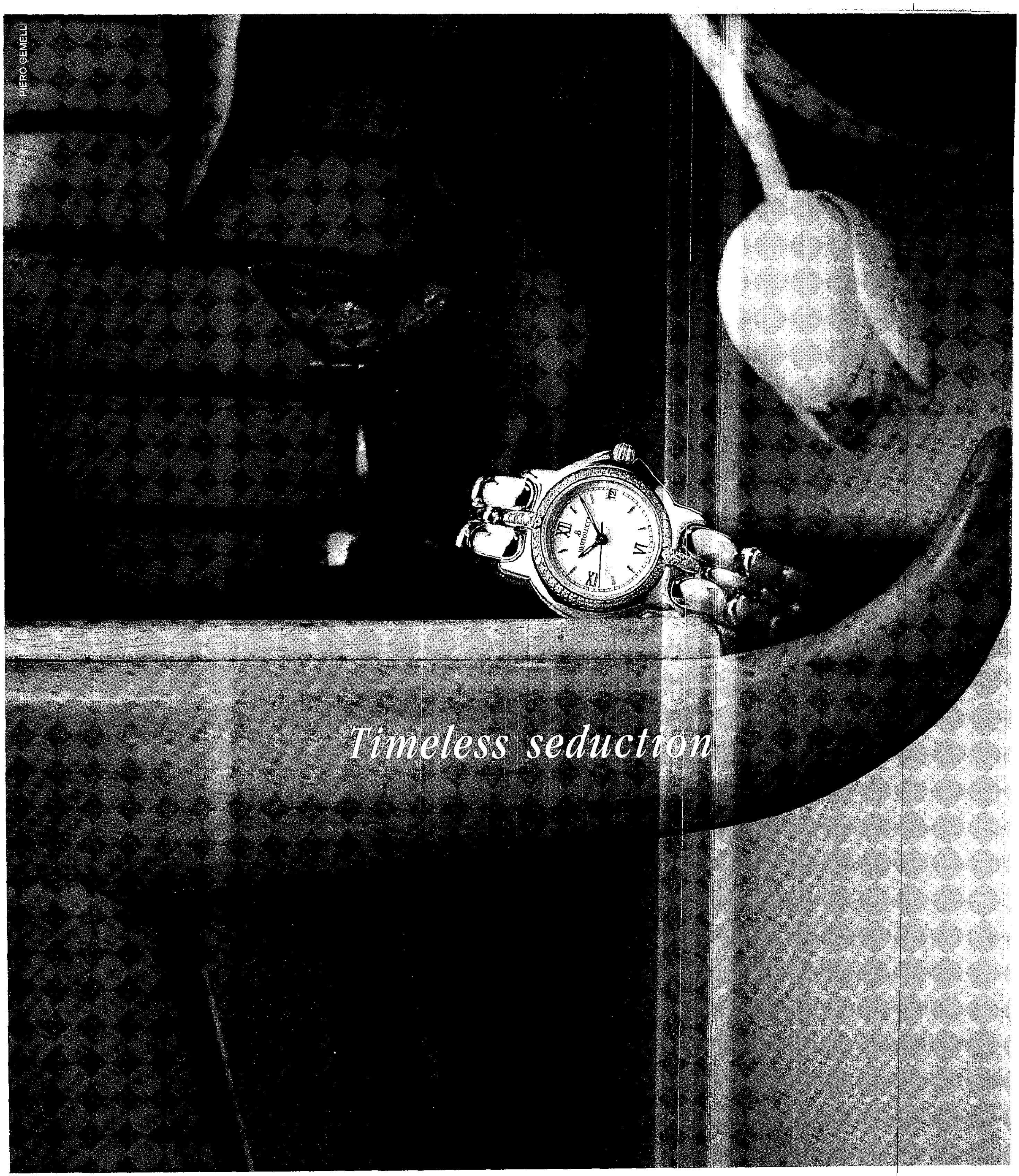

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pages old when we find ourselves knee-deep in used body parts: a head without a torso, seven torsos without heads, a cop without a clue. And the book itself appears to be constructed from bits of other books: where would Allan Folsom be without the snowy, faceless corpses at the start of "Gorky Park," or the mad-scientist/Nazi-menace combo pioneered by Ira Levin in "The Boys from Brazil"? Above all, could he have done it without James Michener? The patent Michener process consists of gathering more research than any book could possibly need, then refusing to jettison a particle of it for the sake of dramatic form. The result, in the case of "The Day After Tomorrow," is not so much a novel as a six-hundred-page fact sheet with occasional breaks for violence, cunningly arranged to give readers the illusion that they are in the holy presence of truth. Hence my favorite moment in the book, the most exquisitely boring clause to be found anywhere in the best-sellers: "Two hundred European cities have bus links with Frankfurt."

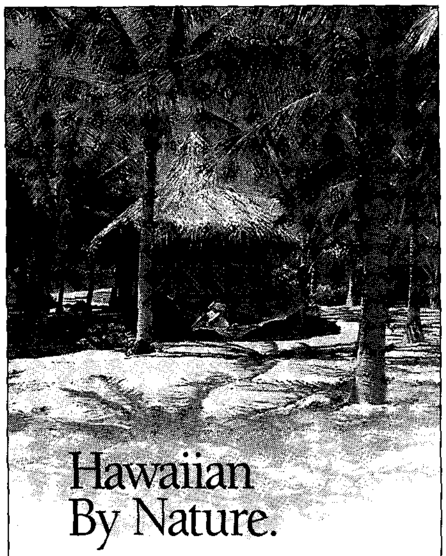
The odd thing about pedantry, however, is that it can't be trusted. Many of the writers on this list are under the impression that if they do the factual spadework, the fiction will dig itself in and hunker down, solid and secure. The effect, unfortunately, is quite the opposite. It suggests that the writers are hanging on for grim life to what they know for fear of unleashing what they don't know; they are frightened, in other words, of their own imagination. And they are right to be: they are up against one of the basic conditions of pulp. When Flaubert studied ancient Carthage for "Salammbô," or the particulars of medieval falconry for "The Legend of St. Julien Hospitalier," he was furnishing and feathering a world that had already taken shape within his mind; when Allan Folsom looks at bus timetables, his book just gets a little longer. You start to feel sorry for his hero, Osborn, who can barely move without barking a shin on his creator's filing cabinet of general knowledge. Thus, before Osborn is allowed to jab succinylcholine into the buttocks of his father's killer, we are taken aside and given a full page on the drug's unique properties, just in case we can't accept its effect on the poor punctured villain. It makes you want to sit Mr. Folsom down and say, It's O.K., we *believe* you. Not that he needs consoling; the advance for this novel, including film and foreign rights, came to $5,300,000. Talk about a conspiracy.

No. 5 on the list is **Inca Gold** (Simon & Schuster; $24), by Clive Cussler. The plot is some farrago about buried treasure in the Andes, and the characters, though intended to be as tough as old boots, are not quite tough enough to curse properly. "Those fornicating baboons" is about as close as they get. The fruitful comparison here is with Judith Krantz, who I thought would be partial to soft-core euphemisms like "manhood" and "moistness" but never hesitates to call a fuck a fuck. The only point of interest in "Inca Gold," in fact, is Cussler's attempt to out-Folsom Allan Folsom, sometimes in the most unsuitable places: "The underwater blast came like the eruption of a huge depth charge as a seething column of white froth and green slime burst out of the sinkhole, splattering everyone and everything standing within 20 meters (66 feet) of the edge." I love that parenthesis more than I can say. Someone should ask Mr. Cussler to edit an anthology of English verse. He could start with Robert Frost:

And miles (multiples of 1.6 kilometres)
  to go before I sleep.
And miles (multiples of 1.6 kilometres)
  to go before I sleep.

The Cussler hero, Dirk Pitt, is equally formal; he even has a trademark logo next to his name on the cover, although it's hard to see why anyone would want to steal it. I have yet to spot the commercial spinoffs—"A double McDirk with medium fries, please"—but they could only be an improvement on the book.

Which brings us to No. 4, **The Bridges of Madison County** (Warner; $16.95), by Robert James Waller. This unusual work has been on the best-seller list for ninety-two weeks running, and the print run already stands at 4,790,000 copies. But who are the satisfied buyers? I don't know anyone who has read the book; I don't know anyone who knows anyone who has read the book. Of course, this simply means that I move in small, crabby circles; but that in itself is an exciting proposition, because it is part of Waller's mission to break through crabbiness and make his readers pure again. He explains in his heart-melting preface, "In an increasingly callous world,



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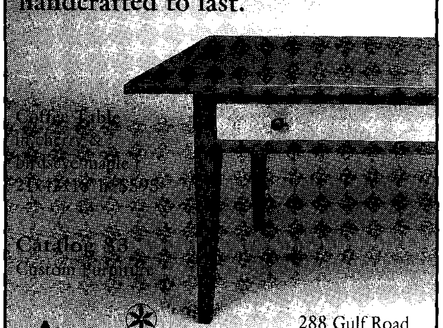

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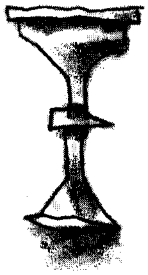
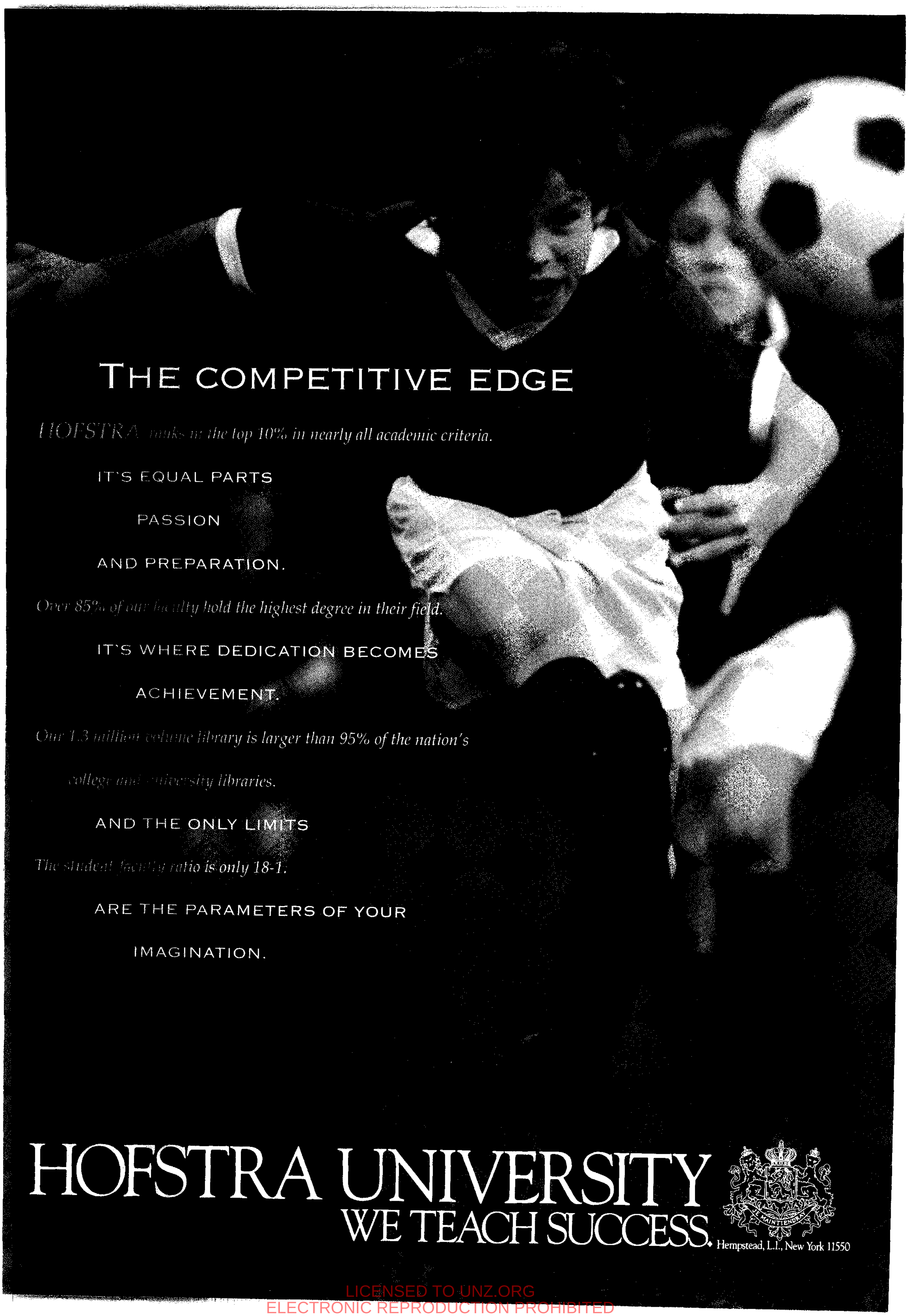
we all exist with our own carapaces of scabbed-over sensibilities. Where great passion leaves off and mawkishness begins, I'm not sure. But our tendency to scoff at the possibility of the former and to label genuine and profound feelings as maudlin makes it difficult to enter the realm of gentleness required to understand the story of Francesca Johnson and Robert Kincaid." This sounds peaceable enough, a plea for literary armistice, but in truth it's more of a preëmptive strike. Readers are being stripped of their wits before they even have a chance to use them; any attempts to criticize the novel will be treated as symptoms of the ailing culture that it is designed to cure. Well, tough.

Set in 1965, "Bridges" tells of a love affair between Kincaid, a photographer, and Francesca, a farmer's wife. They meet, they get on fine, they put away a good vegetarian dinner, they meet again, they make out, and then he quits, forever. Just one of those shits that pass in the night, you might think; but, no, theirs is a passion that transcends time. All this could have been rather touching and graceful; unfortunately, Kincaid and Francesca are not so much the victims of fate as the puppets of an unyielding sentimentalist. Not all of us would agree with the French theoreticians who proclaim the disappearance of the author, but sometimes one can't help wishing that he would disappear a little more. Robert James Waller is the literary equivalent of Leatherface in "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre"—he won't leave his characters alone for a second, preferring to harry them through the landscape and whip them into line with his own point of view. Instead of a clean phrase like "he added," Waller opts for "he quickly tacked on his caveat"; this brand of overwriting is a sure sign of an author who believes himself to be in command of the language but is in fact utterly at its mercy. Robert Kincaid, for example, is not allowed to be an ordinary photographer. He has to be "one of the last cowboys," and a poet to boot: "He liked words and images. 'Blue' was one of his favorite words. . . . He liked other words, such as 'distant,' 'woodsmoke,' 'highway,' 'ancient,' 'passage,' 'voyageur,' and 'India' for how they sounded, how they tasted, and what they conjured up in his mind." *Voyageur?*



That list is a key to the Waller method—a kind of writing-by-numbers, with severe restrictions placed on the available vocabulary. If you added the word "Cheerios" or "horny," for instance, the whole thing would faint with shock. (No phrase has been admitted to the book which you could not imagine being sung by Karen Carpenter.) The high point comes when Francesca ushers Kincaid into a cattle pasture and cautions him, "Watch out for their leavings." There is nothing wrong with precisely chosen diction, of course, but it needs to chime with the substance of the work—unless you have comic intentions, that is, and Waller most certainly does not. His fancy concocts these lean countryfolk, but his language turns them into wimps and snobs. "The world is getting organized, way too organized for me and some others," Kincaid complains. "Hierarchies of authority, spans of control, long-range plans, and budgets. Corporate power; in 'Bud' we trust." Well, hold on here; is this the same guy who has been drinking Bud throughout? "The Bridges of Madison County" sets its face against modern society, but, wittingly or otherwise, it plucks its images of an unblemished life straight from the world of advertising: "tall and thin and hard," Kincaid is the first non-meat-eating Marlboro man. I found all this cowardly and delusive, a vacation brochure pretending to be a vision. Somewhere at the back of it, you catch the faintest echo of Emerson and Thoreau, but that only makes it worse: to hear the accents of Transcendentalism corrupted in this fashion, their severe self-scrutiny softened into narcissism, is worse than not hearing them at all. The victorious sales of "The Bridges of Madison County" make it a more depressing index to the state of America than Beavis, Butt-head, and Snoop Doggy Dogg put together. I got my copy at an airport, behind a guy who was buying "*Playboy's* Book of Lingerie," and I think he had the better deal. He certainly looked happy with his purchase, whereas I had to ask for a paper bag. This book is worse than embarrassing. It's a crock of leavings.

Good news at No. 3, though. You can brush away the Waller with a burst of Sue Grafton. **"K" Is for Killer** (Holt; $22.95) is part of her trudge through the



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alphabet, which began back in 1982, with " 'A' Is for Alibi." She could well have problems in the future; stand by for " 'X' Is for Xenophobic Racism on the Rise in the Former Eastern Bloc with Murderous Consequences for the Ethnic Balance of Coastal California." The books are all about Kinsey Millhone, which is not, as you might think, a large pharmaceutical company but the name of a spunky, industrious female private eye. She has a lousy haircut, no sex life, and a slight case of moral principles, though not enough to make her a prig. "The victims of unsolved homicides I think of as the unruly dead," she says on the opening page. This brought me up short; it is a rather beautiful sentence, all the more provocative for being mildly archaic, and it's not a freak. Every now and then, in the course of a fairly ordinary murder tale, Sue Grafton scores a direct hit: "She was strung out on something, throwing off that odd crackhead body odor. Her eyes kept sliding upward out of focus, like the roll on a TV picture." Saul Bellow wouldn't be ashamed to think of that.

You come away from the book with a keen and sweaty sense of Kinsey's nocturnal prowlings, not to mention her taste in wine. (Chardonnay again, as in Michael Crichton.) But the whodunnit isn't much—secretary doubles as hooker, ends up decomposed—and Grafton relies, like Crichton, on crucial conversations that just *happen* to have been taped. The one conundrum left unexplained is the strange endurance of the mystery genre itself; it's such a thin piece of ground, and it was worked so richly by a couple of early settlers, Hammett and Chandler, that everyone since, even as skilled a worker as Sue Grafton, has been doomed to turn over old soil. You can alter the setting all you like, and change the sex of your shamus, but that sour, sudden poetry will never be wholly your own. This could be the attraction, of course; readers may relish the very lack of originality, like smokers who refuse to switch brands. What could be more cozy than the spectacle of violent crimes, the deepest imprints of human malice, deciphered like crossword puzzles over and over again? (No wonder serial killers are so hot; private eyes are serial solvers, and they need the competition.) If fiction is the art of telling lies, then murder stories are the whitest of all. A couple of them

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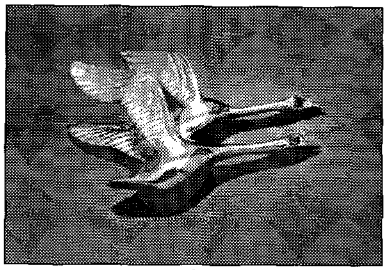

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will always be found sprawled across the best-seller lists—evidence not of the popular appetite for blood but of the popular readiness to wipe it up. They speak of chaos let loose, then controlled: the perennial seesaw plot, as pleasant as the rocking of a cradle.

And so to No. 2, **Remember Me** (Simon & Schuster; $23.50), by Mary Higgins Clark. Ms. Clark looks out from the back cover wearing a fine brocade jacket and the confident smile of a woman with eleven best-sellers already under her belt and plenty more where they came from. Her fictional formulas are nicely worn by now, and the new book flows along the grooves; it never changes course, or tries anything that might upset the fans. This was the Agatha Christie method, too, but in her case practice made perfect: she breezed past all the unsightly psychological stuff but took immense care to stash her clues away in unlikely crannies. Ms. Clark, on the other hand, is so eager not to offend that even her surprises aren't surprising. The plot will ring a few bells. Young married couple, storm at sea, wife in the water, grief, foul play suspected but hard to prove, whole thing turns on the ring from wife's finger. . . . "Sleeping with the Enemy," anyone? The setting is modern Cape Cod, and people drink *that* wine again, but the author's habits are those of a nineteenth-century melodramatist, one of that hearty breed who used to knock out adventures in serial form, leaving the reader gawping on the cliff edge of each installment. "Remember Me" has a hundred and ten chapters, some no longer than a page, and they tend to close like this: "He knows more than he's telling, and I'm going to get to the bottom of it." Menaced by danger, or simply struck by a thought, the characters keep feeling their lips go dry or their throats seize up. At one point, somebody exclaims "Haunted!"—a cry I haven't heard since the golden years of "Scooby-Doo." All this is oddly comforting. You can't imagine actually buying this neat, style-free book, but it's the kind of thing you would borrow from a friend, or find on the shelves of a country inn, and polish off by breakfast the next day. The admonitory title is, of course, to no avail; I came to the end of "Remember Me" and immediately forgot all about it.

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summit, to **The Celestine Prophecy** (Warner; $17.95). The No. 1 author is James Redfield, and he brings good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, especially those with no ear for English prose. "For half a century now, a new consciousness has been entering the human world, a new awareness that can only be called transcendent, spiritual." One would like to know what triggered this fresh start. To many people, after all, fifty years ago means a series of events in Central Europe that prompted them not to tighten their hold upon the spiritual but to question it with unaccustomed force. Mr. Redfield, however, is not one to let history get in his way. He has more important things in mind. He has plans. "Once we do understand what is happening, how to engage this allusive process and maximize its occurrence in our lives, human society will take a quantum leap into a whole new way of life." All this comes from the author's preface, and it immediately raises questions. (1) Does he really mean "allusive"? What is being alluded to? "Elusive" would do equally well, not that it matters. (2) Why does the coy introduction of semi-scientific terms like "maximize" and "quantum leap," presumably intended to make readers feel that they are in safe hands, have entirely the opposite effect? (3) What is this guy *on*?

"The Celestine Prophecy" is set mostly in Peru. I kept waiting for the characters to bump into their counterparts from "Inca Gold." Dirk Pitt has more urgent things to attend to than "a complete explanation of our existence," though, and this lot can hardly think about anything else. They mosey around, escaping from government interference and skeptical scientists ("That guy must really be evil"), watching pink fields of energy grow on their friends, and slowly working their way through the Nine Insights. These are contained in an ancient manuscript, and they reveal a master plan for the survival of our race on this planet. Many of them are variations on the theme (expounded rather more gracefully in the Bible) of "Try and be nice to people," and they reach a sensational climax with No. 9: "The more we evolve, the higher we vibrate." Sounds like a job for Zach.

I was shocked to find this book at the top of the *Times* list, although I shouldn't have been. It's exactly the kind of work that thrives at a time when organized faith is in retreat, and when every variety of garbage—systematic garbage, with pretensions to establishing a homemade religion—floods in to fill the gap. It's nothing new, really: Madame Blavatsky for the nineties. More grievously, it's an insult to the novel. Redfield has no interest in form except as a trampoline for his bouncy ideas—none of which, incidentally, have any discernible meaning. When he does gather his wits and make a gesture toward conventional narrative, the results leave you slack-jawed: "Her name was Sarah Lorner and she was sandy-haired and blue-eyed and could have been described as girlish except for her serious demeanor." It's hard to know what to say. America is not, by and large, a nation of confused, gullible, and sexist hippies, so who is buying this book? In 1973, Gore Vidal claimed that novels had become little more than surrogate movies. If only that were the case. Books like "The Celestine Prophecy" and "The Bridges of Madison County" are something far more sinister: surrogate *non*-fiction. They are guides to life, how-to manuals with a little squirt of plot piped around the edge. It is the very worst fate that could have befallen literature; even Tolstoy, the unrepentant didact, would not have wanted it to end like this. The *Times* nonfiction list for May 15th contains essays on good and evil, a discussion of "love and relationships," and two accounts of near-death experiences. The fiction list, on the other hand, *is* a near-death experience.

Or almost. I went toward the light but pulled back from the brink. After all, I had "The Alienist" to cheer me up. I had discovered Sue Grafton. And the mighty Judith Krantz, with her firm grip on human anatomy: "His eyes had narrowed into two thin question marks." What's more, I had learned a whole bunch of stuff in the course of my reading. Everyone is drinking a lot of Chardonnay, for one thing. And if I ever need to get in and out of Frankfurt in a hurry, I'll know which mode of transport to use. No, I thought, fiction's O.K. The novel will live another day. And so I rose, put down my ten books, tacked on my caveat, engaged my allusive process, and quickly pounded to my own superb release. ♦

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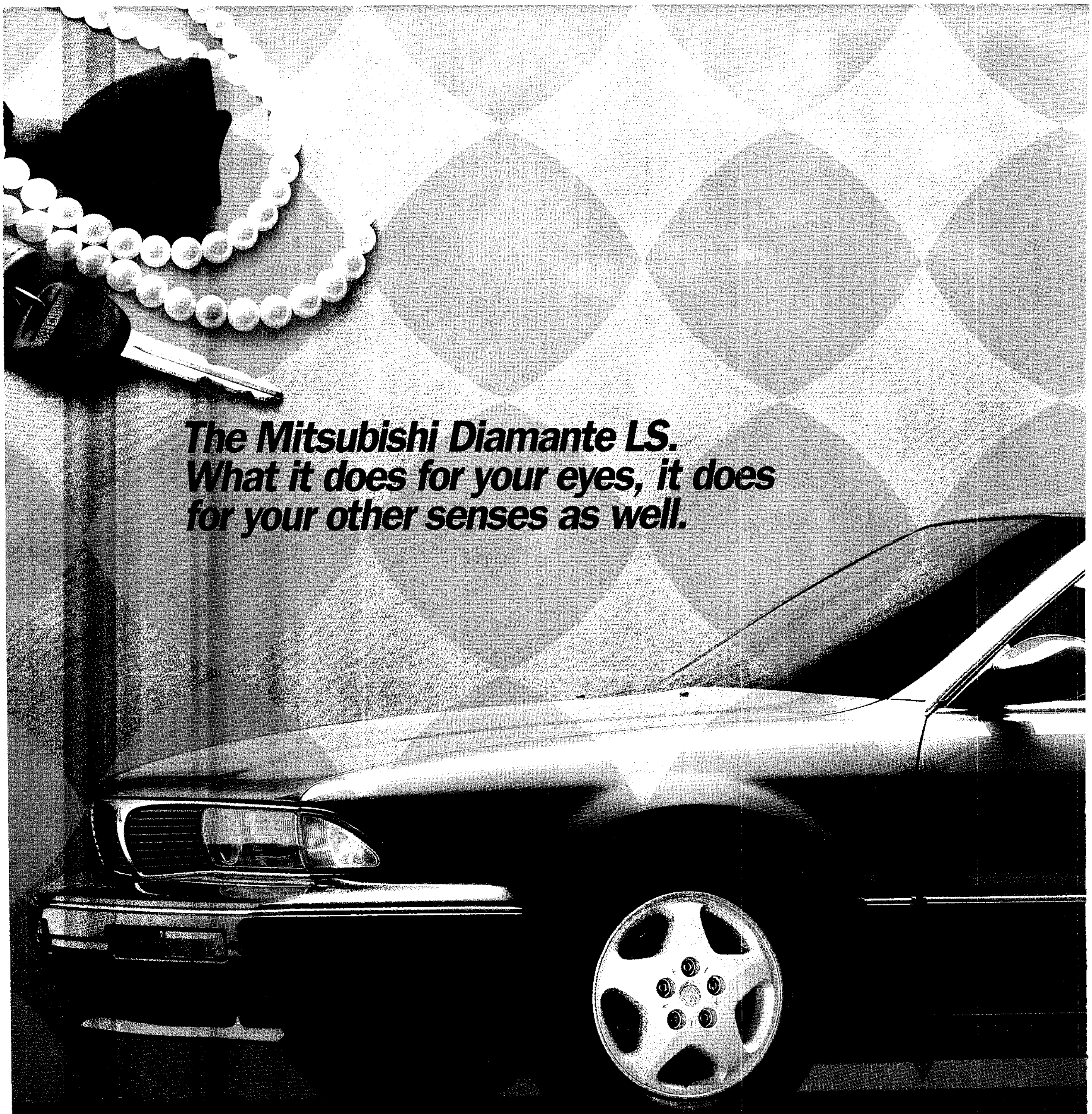
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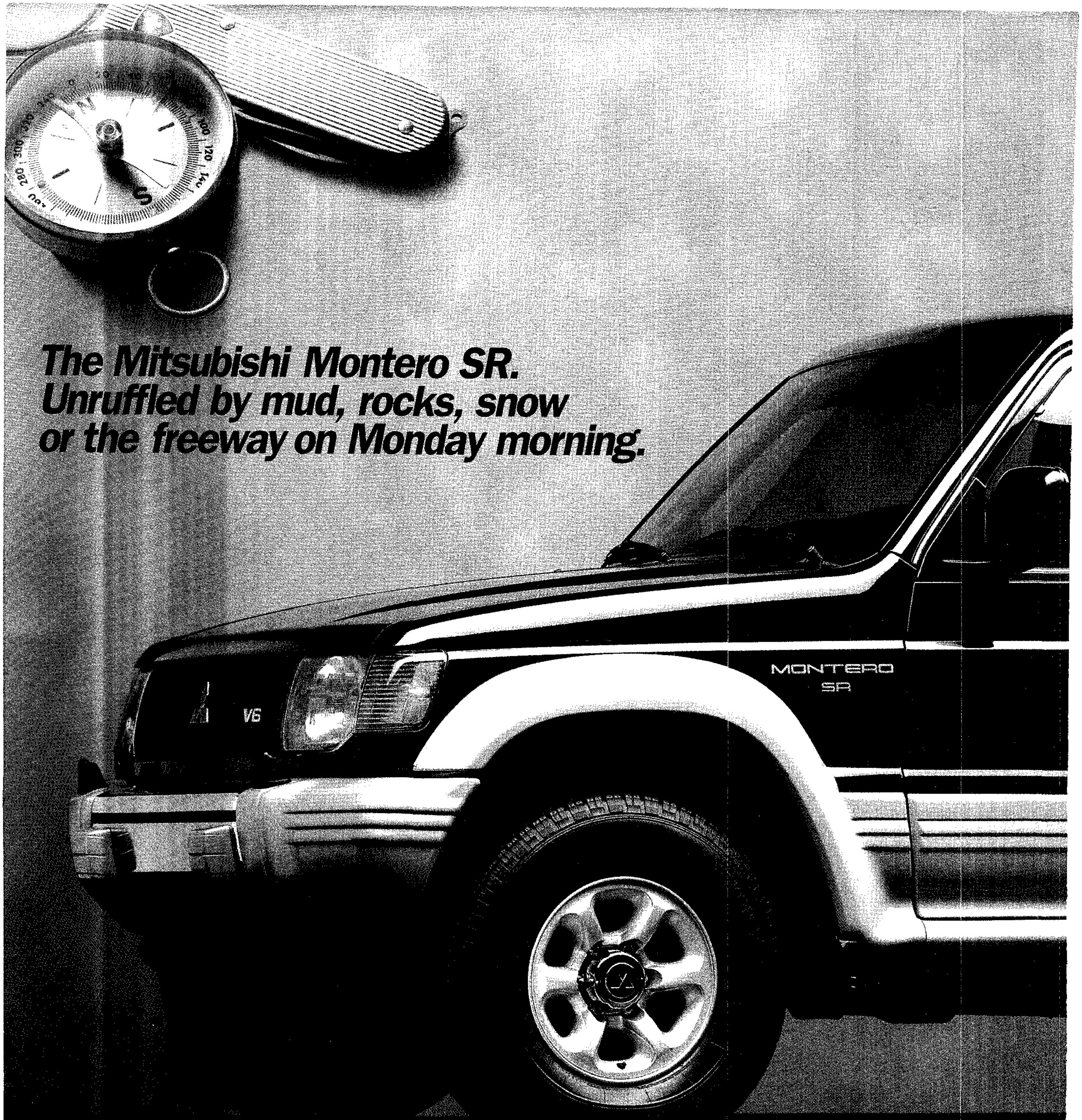

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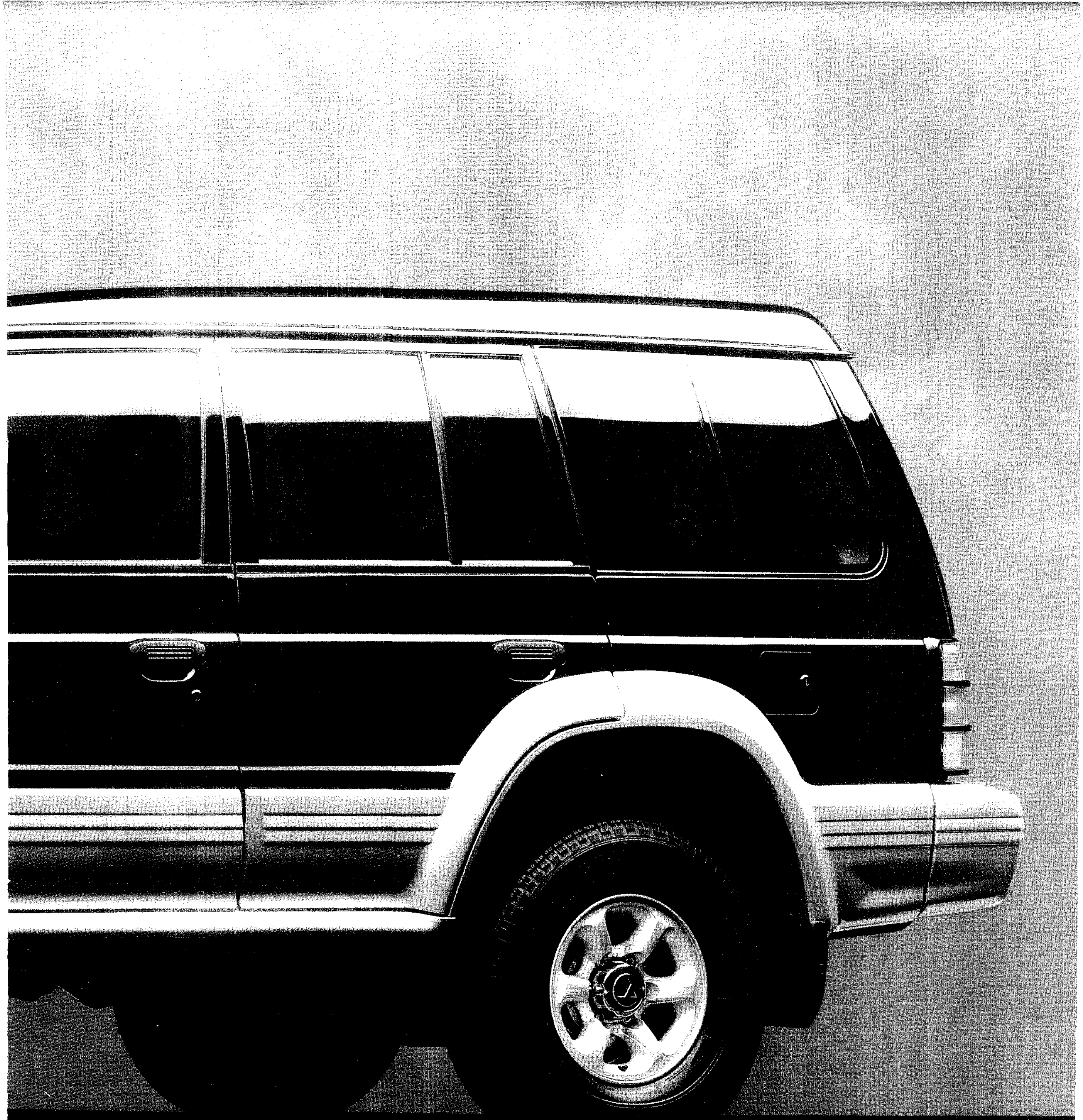
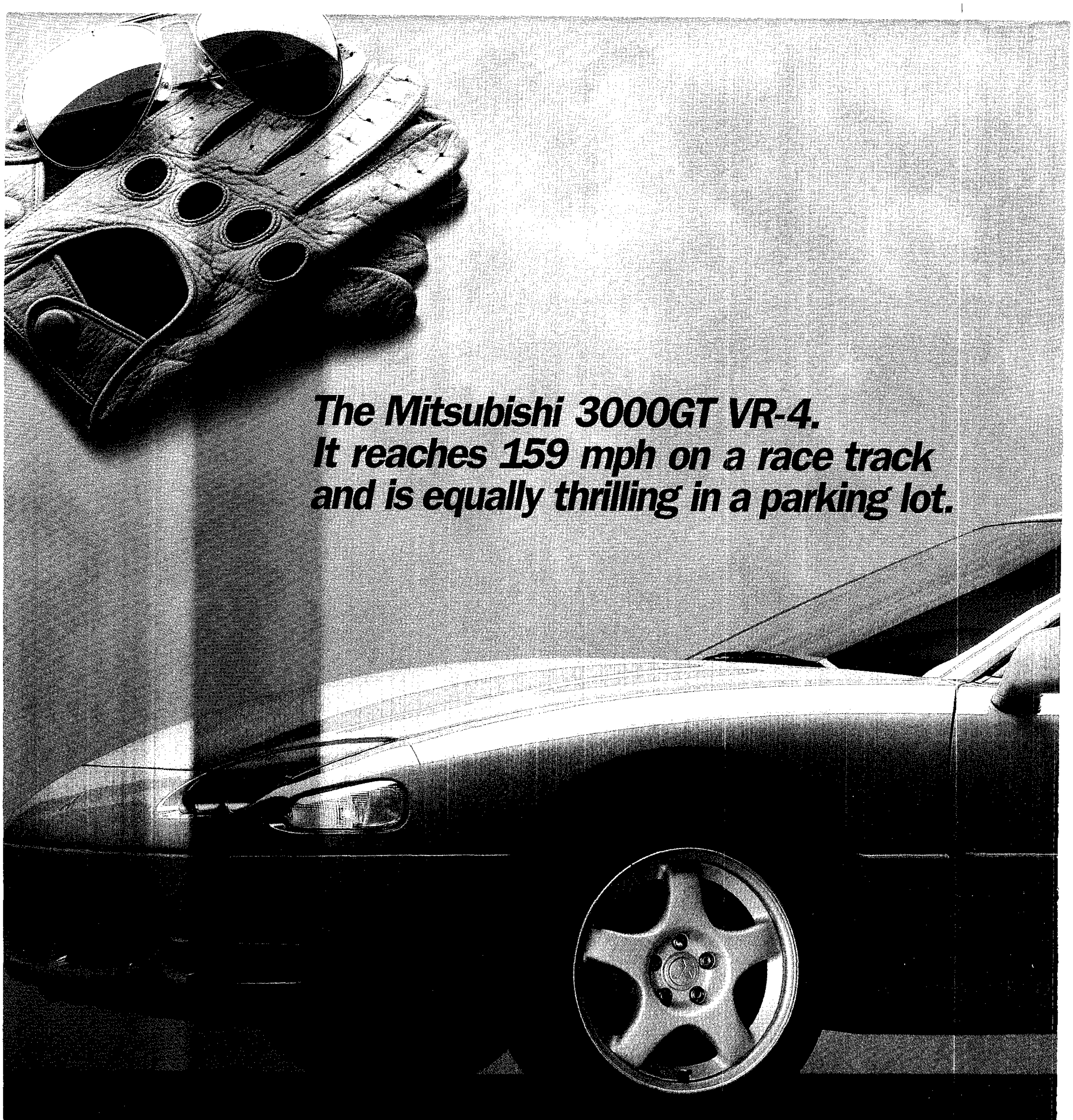


including a premium stereo system, power windows and door locks, cruise control, three-row seating for seven, and available leather and wood interior trim.

*All this, with an off-road racing heritage that, in 1993 alone, produced five major victories for Montero,** including the Paris-Dakar Rally. Such versatility isn't what you expect from a luxury vehicle. But then, it's exactly what Mitsubishi's "new thinking" demands. For more information, or the Mitsubishi Dealer nearest you, call 1-800-55MITSU.*



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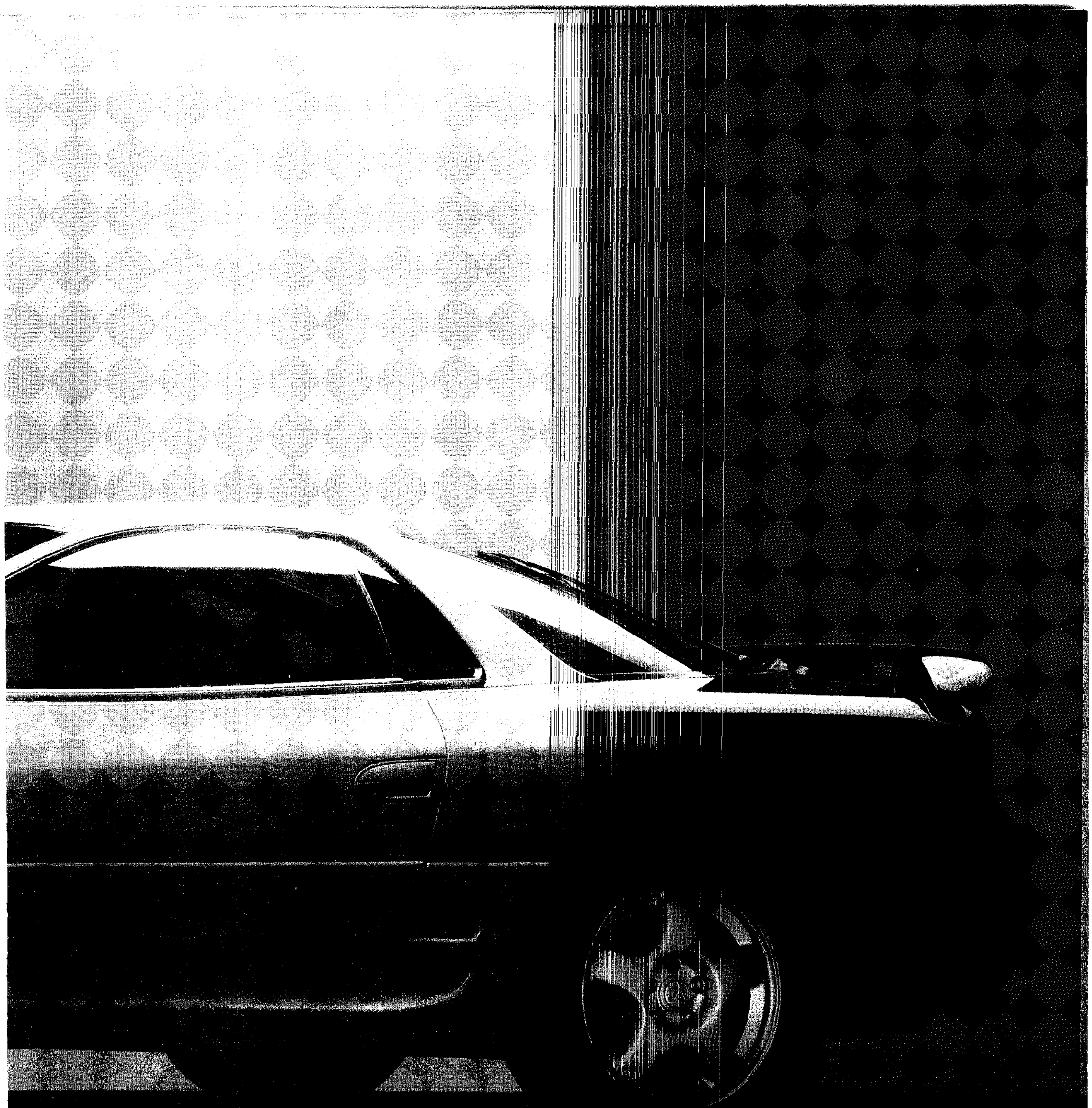

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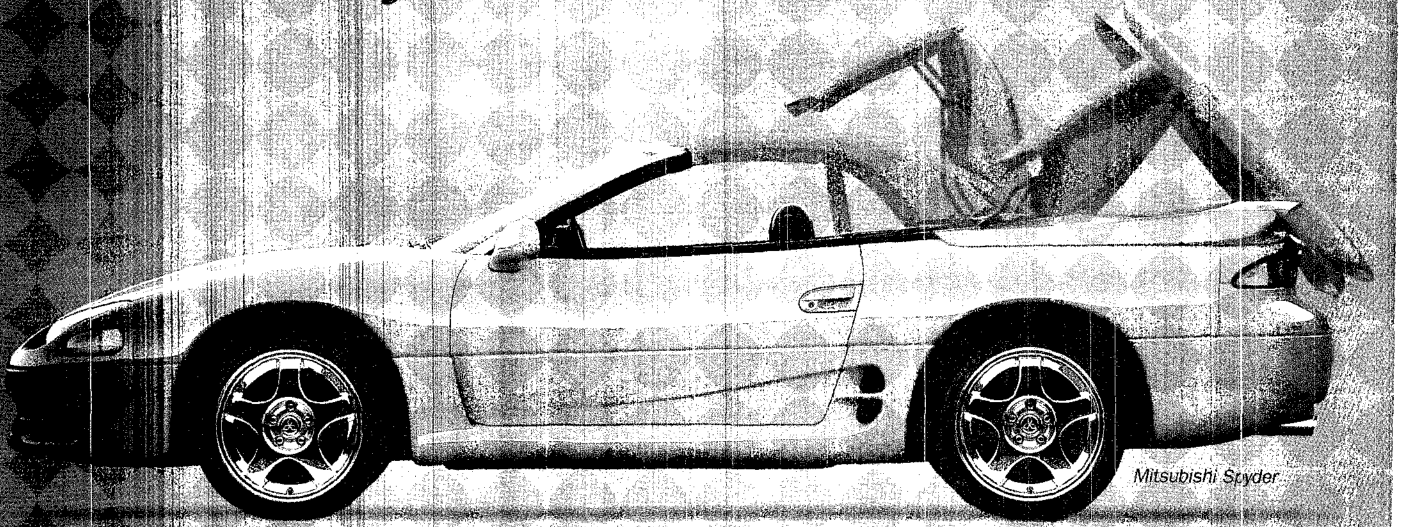

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For Mitsubishi, new thinking is corporate policy. And if that thinking expands accepted parameters of luxury, so much the better. The new Spyder does just that, combining extremes in performance and design, with a major advance in what might be called "open-air technology."

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Of course, the Spyder perfectly exemplifies Mitsubishi luxury in every other respect, as well. From its extraordinary performance, to its opulent interior design, including rich leather trim and a magnificent Mitsubishi/Infinity® sound system with a 6-disc CD auto-changer. So, if your tastes in luxury go to the extreme, please note that the Spyder will be introduced in the fall of 1994. For more information, or the Mitsubishi Dealer nearest you, call 1-800-SPYDER1.

**Road & Track, February 1994. Top speed obtained under test track conditions by professional drivers using special equipment and procedures. Mitsubishi does not advocate exceeding speed limits. **Won by race-prepared, two-door version of the Mitsubishi Montero. †The Spyder's computer-controlled retractable hardtop was designed jointly by Mitsubishi Motors and ASC Incorporated and meets all federal safety standards for a convertible. Vehicle shown is a pre-production 1995 VR-4 model. SL model will also be available. Final production models, available fall 1994, may feature minor trim variations.*

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FICTION

TEN MILES WEST OF VENUS

BY JUDY TROY

AFTER Marvelle Lyle's husband, Morgan, committed suicide—his body being found on an April evening in the willows that grew along Black Creek—Marvelle stopped going to church. Franklin Sanders, her minister at Venus United Methodist, drove out to her house on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of May to see if he could coax her back. Her house was ten miles west of Venus—seven miles on the highway and three on a two-lane road that cut through the open Kansas wheat fields and then wound back through the forest preserve. The woods at this time of year were sprinkled with white blooming pear trees.

Franklin had his radio tuned to Gussie Dell's weekly "Neighbor Talk" program. Gussie was a member of his congregation, and Franklin wanted to see what embarrassing thing she would choose to say today. The week before, she had told a story about her grandson, Norman, drawing a picture of Jesus wearing high heels. "I have respect for Norman's creativity," she had said. "I don't care if Norman puts Jesus in a garter belt."

Today, though, she was on the subject of her sister, whom Franklin had visited in the hospital just the day before. "My sister has cancer," Gussie said. "She may die or she may not. My guess is she won't. I just wanted to say that publicly."

Franklin pulled into Marvelle's driveway and turned off the radio too soon to hear whatever Gussie was going to say next; he imagined it was something unfavorable about her sister's husband, who, for years now, had been sitting outside in his chicken shed, watching television. "One of these days I'm going to dynamite him out of there," Gussie liked to say. She was generally down on marriage, which Franklin couldn't argue with—his own marriage being unhappy, and that fact not a secret among his parishioners.

Franklin parked his new Ford Taurus between Marvelle's old pickup and the ancient Jeep Morgan had driven. Hanging from the Jeep's rearview mirror were Morgan's military dog tags. He'd been in the Vietnam War, though Franklin had never known any details about it. Morgan Lyle had never been forthcoming about himself, and the few times Franklin had seen him at church Morgan had spent the length of the sermon and most of the service smoking outside. "You have to accept him as he is," Marvelle had once told Franklin. "Otherwise, well, all I'm saying is he doesn't mean anything by what he says and does."

Also in the driveway—just a big gravel clearing, really, between the house and the garage where Morgan had had his motorcycle repair shop—was the dusty van their son, Curtis, drove. He was thirty-one and still living at home. Franklin, who was sixty-three, could remember Curtis as the blond-headed child who had once, in Sunday School, climbed out of a window in order to avoid reciting the Lord's Prayer. Now the grownup Curtis, in faded pants and no shirt, his thinning hair pulled back into a ponytail, opened the door before Franklin had a chance to knock. "Well, come on in, I guess," Curtis said. Behind him, Marvelle appeared in the kitchen doorway.

The house was built haphazardly into a hill, and was so shaded with oak and sweetgum trees that the inside—in spring and summer, anyway—was dark during the day. The only light in the room was a small lamp on a desk in the corner, shining down on iridescent feathers and other fly-tying materials. Curtis sat down at the desk and picked up a hook.

"I'll make coffee," Marvelle told Franklin, and he followed her into the

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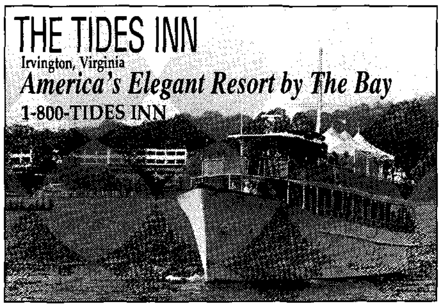

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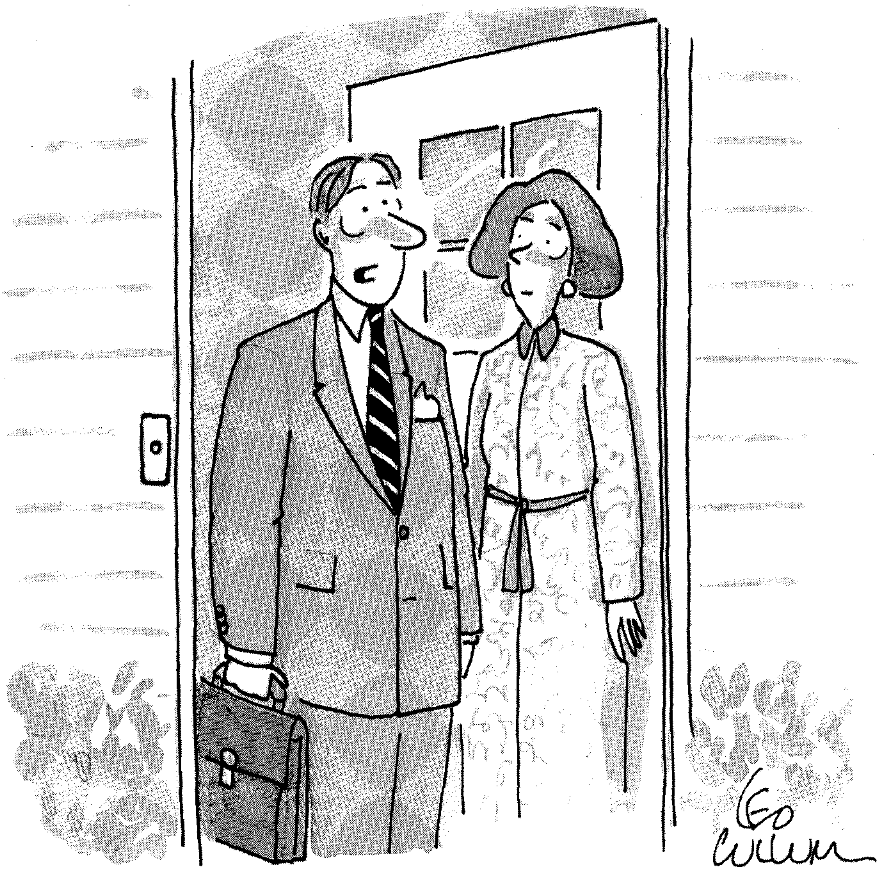

"Wait a minute. Where am I going? I'm a writer."

• •

kitchen, which was substantially brighter. An overhead light was on, and the walls were painted white. "I thought Sunday afternoons were when you visited the sick," Marvelle said.

"It was, but I do that on Saturdays now. I find other reasons to get out of the house on Sundays." Franklin sat at the kitchen table and watched her make coffee. She was a tall, muscular woman, and she'd lost weight since Morgan's death. Her jeans looked baggy on her; her red hair was longer than it used to be, and uncombed. "You could stand to eat more," Franklin told her.

"You men complain when we're fat and then worry when we're thin."

"When did I ever say you were fat?" Franklin said.

Marvelle turned toward him with the coffeepot in her hand. "You're right. You never did."

Franklin looked down at the table. This afternoon, with his mind on Morgan, and not on himself or his marriage, he'd managed to push aside the memory of an afternoon years ago, when he and Marvelle had found themselves kissing in the church kitchen. "Found themselves" was just how it had seemed to him. It was, like this day, a Sunday afternoon in spring; Marvelle and his wife and two other parishioners had been planting flowers along the front walk. Marvelle had come into the kitchen for coffee just when he had. He wasn't so gray-haired then or so bottom-heavy, and they walked toward each other and kissed passionately, as if they had planned it for months.

"You've always been an attractive woman," he said quietly.

"Don't look so guilty. It was a long time ago." Marvelle sat down across from him as the coffee brewed. "The amazing thing is that it only happened once."

"No," Franklin said, "it's that I allowed it to happen at all."

"Where was God that day? Just not paying attention?" Marvelle asked.

"That was me not paying attention to God," Franklin told her.

Curtis had turned on the radio in the living room, and Franklin could faintly hear a woman singing. Louder was the sound of the coffee brewing. The kitchen table was next to a window that overlooked a sloping wooded hill and a deep ravine. These woods, too, Franklin noticed, had their share of flowering pear trees. "It looks like snow has fallen in a few select places," he said.

"Doesn't it? I saw two deer walking down there this morning. For a moment, I almost forgot about everything else."

Franklin looked at her face, which was suddenly both bright and sad.

"That's interesting," he said carefully, "because that's what church services do for me."

"Sure they do. Otherwise, you'd lose your place," Marvelle said.

"You don't realize something," Franklin told her. "I'd rather not be the one conducting them. I feel that more and more as I get older. I'd like to sit with the congregation and just partake."

"Would you? Well, I wouldn't. I wouldn't want to do either one." She got up and poured coffee into two mugs and handed one to Franklin. "How do you expect me to feel?" she asked him, standing next to the window. "Do you see God taking a hand in my life? There are people in that congregation who didn't want to see Morgan buried in their cemetery."

"You're talking about two or three people out of a hundred and twenty."

"I bet you felt that way yourself," Marvelle told him.

"You know me better than to think that," Franklin said.

Marvelle sat down and put her coffee on the table in front of her. "All right, I do. Just don't make me apologize."

"When could anybody make you do anything you didn't want to do?" Franklin said to her.

FRANKLIN left late in the afternoon, saying goodbye to Curtis after admiring Curtis's fly-tying abilities. Marvelle accompanied him to his car, walking barefoot over the gravel. "You'll be walking over coals next," Franklin said, joking.

"Are you trying to sneak God back into the conversation?" Marvelle asked him. She had her hand on his car door as he got in, and she closed the door after him.

"I'm talking about the toughness of your feet," Franklin said through the open window. "I don't expect that much from God. Maybe I used to. But the older I get, the easier I am on him. God's getting older, too, I figure."

"Then put on your seat belt," Marvelle said. She stepped back into a patch of sunlight, so the last thing he saw as he drove away was the sun on her untidy hair and on her pale face and neck.

The woods he passed were gloomier now, with the sun almost level with the tops of the tallest oaks; it was a relief to him to drive out of the trees and into the green wheat fields. The radio was broadcasting a Billy Graham sermon, which Franklin found he couldn't concentrate on. He was wondering about Gussie's sister and if she'd live, and for how long, and what her husband might be thinking, out in that chicken shed. When Franklin was at the hospital the day before, Gussie's sister hadn't mentioned her husband. She'd wanted to know exactly how Franklin's wife had redecorated their bedroom.

"Blue curtains and a flowered bedspread," he had told her, and that was all he could remember—nothing about the new chair or the wallpaper or the lamps, all of which he took note of when he went home afterward.

He was also thinking, less intentionally, about Marvelle, who was entering his thoughts as erratically as the crows flying down into the fields he was passing. She was eight or nine years older than when he'd kissed her, but those years had somehow changed into days. When Franklin tried to keep his attention on her grief, it wandered off to her hair, her dark eyes—to every godless place it could. It wasn't until he heard Billy Graham recite, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters," that Franklin's mind focussed back on Morgan lying in the willows. From that point on he paid attention to the words, falling apart a little when he heard, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," because he didn't know anything more moving, except maybe love, which he didn't feel entitled to; he never had. ♦

Edna O'Brien

HOUSE OF SPLENDID ISOLATION

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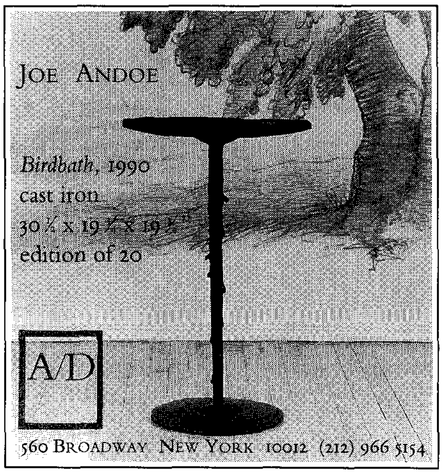

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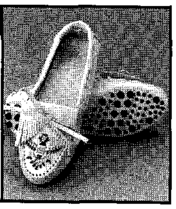

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

STORYVILLE

How do you get published in The New Yorker? After six thousand stories in print and a few hundred thousand rejections, our fiction editors are still looking for the answer.

BY ROGER ANGELL

Do anything long enough, and you hang up a record. Just go to bed every night, and before you know it you've passed Sleeping Beauty. Set down the dog's dinner, day by day, and pretty soon he's put away enough Alpo to feed the Dallas Cowboys on Thanksgiving. "Hey," said a colleague of mine, sticking his head in my office door the other day. "Did you know that you've rejected fifteen thousand stories here? I just figured it out. Fifteen thousand, easy."

Well, thanks. I got out a pencil and did some figuring, and decided that eighteen thousand was probably more like it. I tried to envision that many manuscripts trudging back home again in the rain, and to imagine the reception they got there when they rang the bell—"Oh. You again"—and, wincing, I heard the mumbled apologies and explanations. Then I added on all the other mournful regiments of rejected fiction sent back from this salient, down the years, by fellow-editors of mine in the same line of work: a much larger body of the defeated and the shot-down—a whole bloody Caporetto. "We regret . . . ," I murmured unhappily to myself. "Thank you for . . ." I sounded like a field marshal.

The regret is real, though it may vary in depth from one manuscript to the next. What is certain is that no one can read fiction for thirty-eight years, or thirty-eight *weeks*, and go on taking any pleasure in saying no. It works the other way around. You pick up the next manuscript, from a long-term contributor or an absolute stranger ("Prize in Undergraduate Composition; two summers at Pineaway under Guy de Maupassant; stories in *Yurt*, *Springboard*, and *Yclept;* semifinalist in . . ."), and set sail down the page in search of life, or signs of life; your eye is caught and you flip eagerly to the next page and the one after that. Can it be? Mostly, almost always, it is not—or not quite. You read on to the end (well, not always to the end) and then make a note to yourself about what you will say to your old friend who hasn't sold a story here in two years, or what to put, in some lines scribbled at the end of the printed form, to the young or not so young author who has laid his or her soul out on these eighteen pages but somehow not in a way that makes you want to slow down and enter this particular bar in company with Jay and Hugo and Lynn, or hear more of what was said on the back porch on a particular night of recriminations and fireflies. Sometimes there is a little descriptive passage or some paragraphs of dialogue, or the tone or tinge of a page or two, to single out for praise or encouragement, but even these responses, let it be said, may go into a return letter as much to make yourself feel better, a bit less of a monster, as in any great hopes of getting a socko manuscript from this same author in a month's time.

There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about fiction. "How do you get a story published in *The New Yorker*?" somebody asks. "Send it in, and if we like it we'll publish it," I reply, and my interlocutor shoots me a knowing look and says, "No, *seriously*—"

"Are you looking for the typical *New Yorker* story?" someone else asks. "Sure, lady," I want to answer back. "The one that's exactly like Borges and Brodkey and Edna O'Brien and John O'Hara and Susan Minot and Eudora Welty and Niccolò Tucci and Isaac Singer. That's the one, except with more Keillor and Nabokov in it. Whenever we find one of those, we snap it right up."

A distinguished reporter here, the author of long, ferociously researched articles, stopped by to see me one day in great excitement, to say he was giving up all this drudgery and would write only fiction from now on. "Fiction writers never have to leave their desks, do they?" he said.

"Well, no," I said. "Except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"They have to get up to vomit," I said.

A visiting reporter from a media journal once asked, "What are you people looking for in the fiction line? What are your standards?"

I stalled for time. "I don't know what they are," I mumbled at last. "We've never decided. We want something good—you know, something we like."

"No, *seriously*," she said, but when she saw that we were serious (I had cunningly laid on some colleagues) she closed her notebook. Her piece never appeared.

The writers are the main players, which means that we can hurry past such esoterica as the opinion sheet, on which two or three or more fiction editors weigh in helpfully or warily or stubbornly ("Hate to disagree, but—") on an incoming manuscript; often the process turns up some structural flaws, and the work is shipped back to its creator for minor or major repairs. Or rejected. No contributor is spared this blunt possibility, which may explain why certain celebrated authors have attempted to negotiate an acceptance before a story of theirs is sent along, or have stopped submitting altogether. Lack of unanimity on an opinion sheet is not uncommon, nor is the brave or truculent silence of a dissenting editor in the face of a story that has been taken in spite of his or her fervent objections: a turn of events that brings brief, rushing doubts about the future of Western civilization, or about the sanity of the Editor, who has had the last word. This is a weekly, thank God, and a few days later we fiction people are out in the hall exclaiming over a new manuscript, by an old standby or a total unknown, that has just gone the rounds: "Have you *read* it? Isn't that terrific!" Some writer has made our day, and we are collegial once again, gleaming in reflected brilliance.

Just as there is no one way to write a story, there is no one way to edit it for publication, or to deal with its author over an extended period of time. What is being set down here, I mean, is one editor's experiences and recollections of these semi-private matters—a selective history that cannot give proper honor to my departmental colleagues, past and present, or to writers whose work did not happen to come my way. What I noticed about bygone fellow fiction editors at the magazine—among them, Robert Henderson, William Maxwell, Robert Hemenway, Rachel MacKenzie, Frances Kiernan, Patricia Strachan, and Veronica Geng—was how much alike they were in their passion for their work, and how different in the ways they went about it. The same holds true for my present friends and everyday companions here, whose devoted attentions continue the long line of *New Yorker* stories—over six thousand of them so far—while properly encouraging its alteration, almost issue by issue, in directions unforeseen. Fiction is special, of course, for its text must retain the whorls and brush-splashes of the author: the touch of the artist. At the same time, the editor should not feel much compunction about asking the writer the same questions he would put to himself about a swatch of his own prose: Is it clear? Does it say what I wanted it to say? Is it too long? Does it *sound* right—does it carry the tone that I want the reader to pick up right here? Is it, just possibly, too short? And so on. (It's no coincidence, by the way, that so many *New Yorker* fiction editors have also been writers.)

Some distinguished editors here have forsworn most such meddling, particularly with young contributors, on the theory that the writer almost always knows best. My own instincts lean the other way, for the obligation to preserve the sanctity of a neophyte's script is counterbalanced by my hope that he will, by life habit, come to ask himself those short, tough questions as he writes along, never omitting the big question at the end: Is it good enough? Is it any good at all? Lifelong practitioners—the best ones, I've noticed—ask themselves this every day: that's why they look the way they do (hunched over their word processors, or at the bar next door), which is like morticians.

PETER DE SÈVE

That new story we exclaimed about will be brilliant, but perhaps not right away. A week has gone by, and its author—a young man in his twenties, let's say, not previously published in *The New Yorker* or anywhere else—is in my office. We are sitting side by side at the desk, with his manuscript between us, and on its top page he finds some light pencillings and question marks. What's this? The joyful, sunstruck expression he has worn ever since he got the good news fades a fraction; middle age, one could say, has just begun. They *edit* fiction here? "Don't worry," I say. "Let's take a look. Down here, do you want these three whole lines about the dog, who doesn't turn up again in the story until . . . until over here on page 11? Do you want to say something quicker about the dog? Up to you . . . But before this, up here at the top of the paragraph, I'm not sure why the father seems so bitter. Do you need to explain that, or have you made him seem angrier than you meant to? Well, let's mark that and move on . . . Over here on page 4, just after Lucinda goes off in the truck, you've used this same construction for the third time in a row—you've got awfully fond of those dashes. Want to do it some other way? And then here's your 'dirgelike darkness,' right in the middle of this wonderful scene. Can darkness have a *sound*? What should we do about that?"

I pause and look at him. He is trying to decide whether I'm simply a bully or someone out to steal his writer's soul. Perhaps it's neither. How can he be persuaded that these are the same wireworms and dust balls that every writer discovers in the corners of his beautiful prose, no matter how carefully he has woven it and laid it down? The young man looks pale, and who can blame him? He feels himself at a brink. He wants to be an artist, but he also wants to be a pro. His words, which once looked so secure, so right, are beginning to let him down. Why is this all so hard? Why has the language suddenly turned balky? He needs time to think it over.

"Never mind the dashes," I offer now. "I think they'll work fine. And you can look at that 'dirgelike' later on, when this is all in type."

We go on to the next page, and I have a passing brief memory of other writers, sitting just here to my left, as we bend over a manuscript or a proof together. William Maxwell, cheerfully x-ing out a proposed line change (marked "for clarity" at the margin of the galley), smiles and says, "I don't want to be *too* clear." Donald Barthelme, encountering a short paragraph with my "Omit?" at its flank, sighs and reddens. He is the cleanest of writers, and proud. "Well, yes, goddam it, if you say so," he mutters at last. "I count on you to get the hay out." And then it is my turn to wonder if I'm right. Later on, I may recall some words of William Shawn's—the only advice about editing I ever heard him put forward. "It's very easy to make somebody's manuscript into the best story ever written," he said. "The trick is to help the writer make it into the best story he can write on that particular day."

If I could do it, I would invite the first-time author to come back on a day when I am sitting here with John Updike, going over the galley proofs of a story of his, or discussing them with him on the telephone. Updike has rewritten (in his angling pencilled handwriting) some lines of his, up on top of a long paragraph, and we are trying to decide about a word in the middle of one sentence. "Well, you may be right," he says in his soft, musing way. "Which do you think *sounds* better?" He says the phrase with the word in it over to himself once or twice and makes a decision. The following day, after this and a dozen other burning trifling matters have been resolved, I overnight the revised page proofs to him at his home in Massachusetts, and two days later—on the morning the story must go to press—the proofs come back to me with the word and the whole section we discussed crossed out. The top of the paragraph has been redone in pencil, done differently: the content is the same, but the tone, the feeling, of the passage has shifted. Elsewhere on the proofs, Updike has altered some bits of punctuation, crossed out things, reworded something else. This is the way the story will appear in the magazine, and, later on, the way it will read in the next collection of Updike's stories. The book will go into libraries, and into some school and college curricula, I imagine. The way the story reads—the words that students will find in the book and will believe were put down that way from the beginning, cut in stone—is only another stage in the struggle to get the writing to do its work: the version that the author and the editor had to let go of in the end.

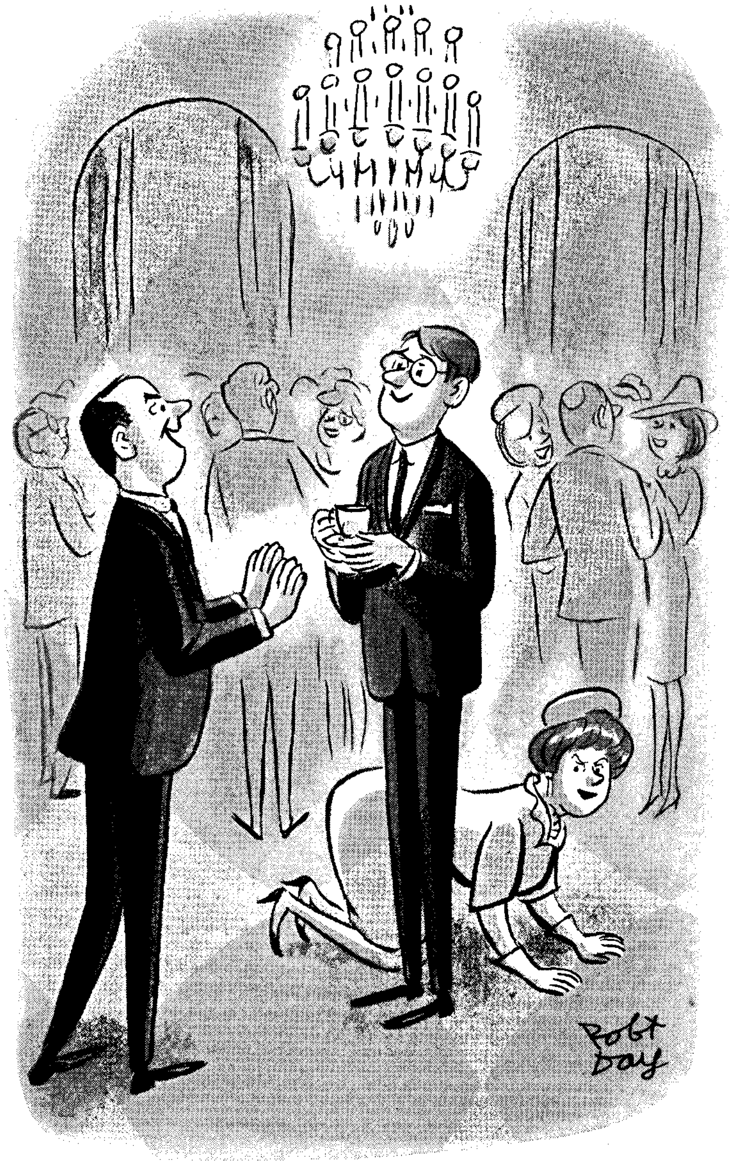
The young writer's own galleys (with some of the queries and suggestions taken, others not) will be finished up, too, one day, and he and I will shake hands, out by the elevators. The story will appear next week—a great moment for us both. He is launched, and his tippy little canoe will soon disappear round the bend, on a journey whose duration no one can tell. I don't think he knows how short it may turn out to be, or how unimaginably long. "Let us hear from you," I say.

READING short-fiction manuscripts can be wearing and wearisome from day to day and week to week. Every human situation, every sort of meeting or conversation, is something you have read before or know by heart. But then here comes a story—maybe only a couple of paragraphs in that story—and you are knocked over. Your morning has been changed; *you* are changed. A young woman and her sister, a nun, are talking in the back yard in the evening, and Sister Mary Clare says that she is going to take a vow of silence. "Do you think it's a bad idea?" she asks, and her sister says no, it's a good idea.

> "If you care, I'm not very happy," Sister said.
> "You were never happy," Melissa said. "The last time I saw you laughing was the day that swing broke. Remember that day?"

Spare and pure, the story murmurs along to its ending. It is intimate and painful and then it stops, and these particular lives go on. It is Mary Robison's "Sisters," her first acceptance here—though not, I believe, her first submission. It was written in 1977 and now feels like part of its time, but what I felt when I came to those lines is still fresh and strong. Every fiction editor here has had such an experience, and eagerly waits for the next one.

That same era brought a freshet of striking fiction from Ann Beattie: along with the painful, sensual feelings of loss in those stories came assemblages of characters apparently insatiable for company but increasingly alone—young men and women talking and cooking, arriving from somewhere, telling stories, picking up on ironic details,



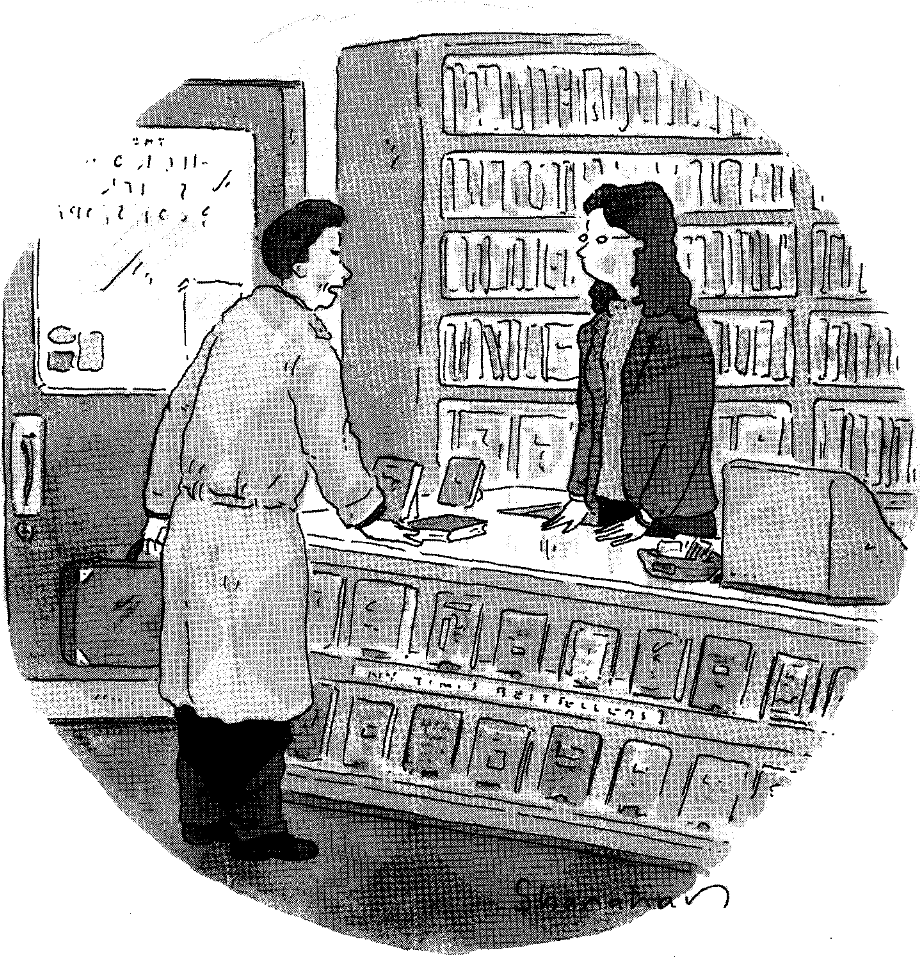
"My wife and I recognized ourselves in that novel of yours, old boy."

FROM THE NEW YORKER, NOVEMBER 27, 1965

patting the dog, getting drunk, changing the music, driving to town for pizza, waking up in the night, waiting for something else to happen. The titles—"Vermont," "Tuesday Night," "Shifting," "Downhill," "A Vintage Thunderbird," "Colorado," and the rest—are a generational montage now, but the stories remain vital news for anyone who read them when they were just written and just out.

"Epiphanies" became the chic, dismissing word for scenes of this kind, but other forms of the short story, arriving here in due course, seemed only to reach the same ends by a different route. Bobbie Ann Mason's scrupulously detailed accounts of a younger K mart generation of Southerners, living in mobile homes and shabby condos and making do with the remnants of their parents' lost rural America, brought characters less inclined to linger on what was happening around them but perhaps no less aware that something had been going wrong in their world. Mason is such a sharp noticer of down-home detail—her people make Star Trek needlepoint pillows, own cats named Moon Pie, unexpectedly find the name "Navratilova" floating in their heads, and know that "Radar Love" is a great driving song—that we sometimes don't give her her full due as a chronicler of American loss. I remember once asking whether her men and women felt emotion without always finding ways to show it, and she said, "I don't understand. I thought these stories were nothing but emotion." Then, a year or two later, while she was finishing her poignant post-Vietnam novel, "In Country," a section of which ran here in 1985, she called me and said, "The emotion has turned up. I don't think I can *stand* much more of this."

We editors wait for whatever it is that the writers are trying to discover, and sometimes it arrives here in surprising forms. Once, it arrived in a flash—a gas explosion in a parking lot, where some kids were listening to Bruce Springsteen over their radios and had flicked their lighters during "Born in the U.S.A." That 1988 story, Alan Sternberg's "Blazer," was the first of his gritty, eloquent panoramas of southern Connecticut mechanics and builders and carpenters and cops and landfill inspectors toughing out hard times and industrial decline, along with their wives—who, all in all, were handling it a lot better than they were.



"No caffè latte? And you call yourselves a bookstore?"

• •

Stories and groups of stories work differently, and may require editors and readers to learn their particular tone and language before they can reach us, sometimes while an author is also struggling to find a direction or an opening that is not yet clear. Now and then, a writer stakes out an entire region of the imagination and of the countryside—one thinks of Cheever, Salinger, Donald Barthelme, and Raymond Carver, and now Alice Munro and William Trevor—which becomes theirs alone, marked in our minds by unique inhabitants and terrain. Writers at this level seem to breathe the thin, high air of fiction without effort, and we readers, visiting on excursion, feel a different thrumming in our chests as we look about at a clearer, more acute world than the one we have briefly departed. Reading Alice Munro's tales (the old word fits here) brings back for me, every time, the mood of thrilling expectancy with which I read the entrancing events in all those variously tinted fairy-story collections of my childhood—"The Blue Fairy Book," "The Yellow Fairy Book," "The Grey Fairy Book," and the rest. Trevor's stories, by contrast, are quieting, but with the awful calm of acceptance: his precise, deadly stitchings of country or family circumstances and cruelties leave their victims, for the most part, silent or almost decorously murmurous in resignation.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's stories, arriving here (on crinkly, tightly typed airmail paper) from India in a steady stream through the sixties and seventies, moved at a pace that sometimes made me fidget or sigh impatiently for more action and swifter developments—but only while I was still in the early pages. Reading along, I would find myself slowing, and listening to the sounds and hours of a different continent, as I grew aware of the grinding societal weight with which lives were being fixed, in comical or gruesome or affecting fashion, in the multilayered modern India she knew so well. Mrs.

THE WRITER'S TOWN: 1990

SOME prose written after the third kiss from her (and after the doctor took three stitches in my thumb). I sit at her desk in her office looking out her large window: Give me the huge actual clouds of the Republic and not the meagre udders of water vapor painted on the old backdrops the Republic Studio used in John Wayne's day. We like the actual big baggy clouds of a New York spring. One doesn't want to flog a transiting cloud to death, but if we are to have sentimental light, let us have it at least in its obvious local form—dry, white, sere, and, I guess, provincial. The spiritual splendor of our drizzly and slaphappy spring weather, our streets jammed with sneezing pedestrians, our skies loony with bluster are our local equivalents of lilac hedges and meadows.

Blustery, raw, and rare—and more wind-of-the-sea-scoured than half-melted St. Petersburg. Yuck to cities that have an immersed-in-swamp-and-lagoon moist-air light. They are for watercolorists. Where water laps at the edges of the stones and bricks of somewhat wavery real estate is not home. Home is New York, stony and tall: its real estate is real.

So is its spring.

From "Spring Fugue," by Harold Brodkey

Jhabvala, who is Polish but is married to an Indian architect, wrote, in the introduction to her last collection, "Out of India," of her deep discomfort with the hypocrisies and ironies of her second country. "I have no heart for these things here," she said, and, "All the time I know myself to be on the back of this great animal of poverty and backwardness." Almost in self-defense, it appears, she watched and wrote. Her stories can be satirical (a wealthy, Anglicized young Indian, making out with a similarly modernized girl on a date, thinks, I am kissing a Parsee), or simultaneously touching and tough-minded (an old woman attempts to explain the lifelong passion that keeps her close to the elderly, Dutch-born sahib who has been her careless lover), or scarifying (in a similar situation, a police superintendent sexually mounts his Muslim mistress while encouraging her to pray out loud, after her fashion, on her knees). Jhabvala's fiction runs more to novels these days, and since leaving India she has given most of her attention to screenwriting, as her Oscar-winning screenplays for the long-established Merchant-Ivory production company attest. It would be ungrateful to complain.

The movies have also snatched away a different but no less valued contributor, Woody Allen. Most of his work for this magazine, to be sure, came in the form of wild parodies and casuals, which isn't quite what we're talking about here, but at least one submission, "The Kugelmass Episode," is a dazzling short story, a Koh-i-noor of the form—not the first attribute that would come to mind while one is wheezing or pounding one's thigh in happiness over the C.C.N.Y. humanities professor Sidney Kugelmass, who, through the ministrations of a magician, is able to bring the live Emma Bovary to New York (he stashes her at the Plaza) and, conversely, to visit her at Yonville. Allen's modest early submissions here so resembled the work of his literary hero S. J. Perelman that I had to remind him that we already had the original on hand; he saw the point and came up with the remedy, almost overnight. Those first casuals also seemed to carry a joke, or sometimes two or three jokes, in every sentence—something that didn't work as well on the page as it did when one heard the same stuff during one of Woody's stand-up routines at the Bitter End. "*Fewer* laughs?" he said doubtfully, and, horrified at the thought, I nodded yes—yes, please.

"Whatever Works" should be the sampler that a fiction editor keeps affixed to his wall, or up over the water cooler. Mary Robison's story "Yours" seemed to have some missing manuscript pages when it turned up in the mail in 1980, but after I'd read its seven hundred and ninety words it was plain that a single line more would be much less. "We" was the title of Mary Grimm's 1988 story about a Midwestern working-class neighborhood of young newly married women friends, and the pronoun was repeated through multiple scenes, in paragraph after paragraph, as the group became less obsessed with sex and more with children, tried out recipes and new jobs, and grew older and more private together. The "we" was an impossibility, a trick, but one that became more pleasing and useful and right as the story moved to its terrific conclusion.

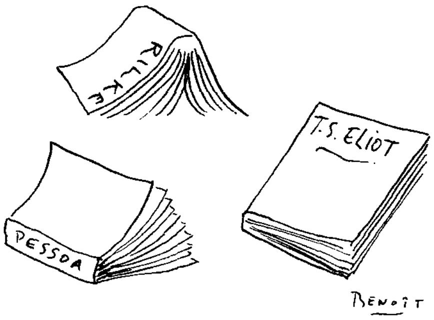
You never know. Edith Templeton's engaging first-person stories of her childhood in the grand-monde nurseries and castles of Czechoslovakia in the nineteen-twenties, which ran here thirty years ago and more, offered no preparation for "The Darts of Cupid," in 1968, a rending erotic love story about a married British woman working in the United States War Office outside London during the Second World War: a novella of power and perfection. Twenty-three years passed, and then here came her "Nymph & Faun," a twisted tale about money and wills and antique silver and marital cruelty that unfolds, at length, in a writhingly intimate conversation between an art dealer and a reclusive older woman, a widow, who understand each other because each can speak the drawling, edged, deadly language of the British upper crust. Mrs. Templeton, who lives in Bordighera, on the Italian Riviera, readily admits that most of her stories are true stories, but this time the mining and extraction of a clear line of events from her many pages of manuscript, and then her early and late galley proofs (on which her interpolations, done in green ink, ran to dogs and artists, British naval parlance, psychiatry, Mayfair scandals, quotations from Dante and Isaac Singer and Thomas Mann, visits to a Maharaja and the King of Nepal, Hemingway's suicide, and the workings of international art dealerships), produced from each of us long letters filled with questions and explanations but set down in tones of trust and mutual pleasure over the work we were engaged in together. It almost made me wish I'd been an antiquarian, so that I could concentrate on keeping hold of things instead of taking them out. We parted at last (we have never met), after exchanging a final thick set of airmailed galleys and agreeing that it was time to push this child out the door to fend for itself. I have at hand a page of her correspondence, discussing point 14, on galley 20, where she describes a figure of Dürer's, in the story. "I'd like it to stand—hood, scythe, hourglass . . . death being alone, and not wanting to be had up for speeding." And she adds, "As Goethe said of a painter, 'He doesn't paint red velvet, but the idea of it.' " Her stories, she wrote to me farther along in this letter, were "outside facts underpainted with subjective feelings"—a definition of fiction that will do as well as any other.

WHAT becomes clear is that we can't sum up this tough, shifting, indefinable medium with these samplings, or talk about a few *New Yorker* story writers while excluding the vital many, including those scores of contributors who gave us one or two or three wonderful works of fiction and then, for one reason or another, or for no apparent reason, could not or did not write more. To convey some idea of the long flow of fiction here, I can do no more than list a handful of splendid contributors, whose names and work will have to stand for the rest: Eudora Welty, Mavis Gallant, Gabriel García Márquez, Nancy Hale, Brian Friel, Jean Stafford, Jean Rhys, Edward Newhouse, Robert M. Coates, Peter Handke, Roald Dahl, Deborah Eisenberg, Milan Kundera, Mark Helprin, Michael Chabon, Tom Drury, Doris Lessing, Shirley Hazzard, Frederick Barthelme, Peter Taylor, Laurie Colwin, Jamaica Kincaid, Alice Adams, Cynthia Ozick, Nicholson Baker, Thom Jones.

There have been stories in this magazine that felt like nothing in the language that had come before, and there is great pleasure for me in thinking back to some of our predecessor fiction editors—among them Katharine White and Gus Lobrano and William Maxwell—and imagining what they must have felt when they first read John Cheever's "The Enormous Radio" (or "Goodbye, My Brother" or "The Country Husband"); Frank O'Connor's "My Da"; Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"; J. D. Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor"; Vladimir Nabokov's "Lance"; Harold Brodkey's "Sentimental Education"; Muriel Spark's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"; and many others.

It's funny, too, to look back at myself, thirty years ago, opening the stories from Donald Barthelme (with his name typed at the top left corner of the manila envelope) that first brought us his pasteups and headlines, the falling dog, the pitched street battles with bands of Comanches, the lost fathers, Eugénie Grandet and Montezuma and Hokie Mokie, and the seven men—Bill, Hubert, Kevin, and the others—living with Snow White while she dreams of princes and pushes her shopping cart. "What *is* this?" subscribers asked indignantly, and though it wasn't always easy to frame an answer, what we all knew for certain, editors and readers (most of them) alike, was that we were lucky.

The new is alluring, but not always what matters most. What is more pleasing to a long-term editor or a loyal subscriber than to watch a master of fiction—a Prospero or a Jefferson of the form—as he walks his thematic acres and then, once again, falls to work? John Updike, unfailingly curious and spirited and reflective, circles back to the Maples, or to his native Pennsylvania small town, or to his mother and her death, reopening and revisiting lives and connections he has been setting down in these pages for forty years; and some of the late stories—"A Sandstone Farmhouse," "His Mother Inside Him," "Playing with Dynamite"—carry a grave power not touched by him before. William Maxwell goes home to his boyhood in Lincoln, Illinois, still again, to bring back a shocking sixty-year-old murder (that novel, "So Long, See You Tomorrow," ran here in 1979), or to tell about his brother's terrible accident, or to reconsider the complex, silent lives of the black servants in his family's house and in other houses then, and, if we think at first that we have been there before, the story, without fail, will show us why this trip was essential for him and for us.



WEEKS and stories go by, and one of the records that are being run up, one realizes, is a life's work. V. S. Pritchett is as old as the century, and, while there is little about him that feels monumental, he is England's grand master of the short story and our language's presiding man of letters. He has been a contributor to this magazine for forty-five years, and, if he has at last laid aside his pen, the total of his published pieces here (stories and incomparable reviews and critical works), which stands at a pausing hundred and four, will always suggest that the next one may turn up in tomorrow's mail. Reading the stories once again, we see the freedom he has felt with strangers and odd ducks, and hear his avidity for dialogue. Children and elders, clubmen and decorators, hairdressers and antiquarians and bullying menservants, cranky or sensual widows, and gardeners and shopkeepers and artists are on hand, in story after story, all crammed together, misunderstanding and mystifying each other, giving themselves away in noble or squalid fashion, startling themselves with life.

Sir Victor has always insisted that he is more craftsman than artist, and claims that plots are almost beyond him, but he is too modest. The three interconnected Noisy Brackett stories, which begin with "The Key to My Heart," are made up of car chases, crooked business dealings, drunkenness, gossip, class snobbery, and comic invention: the ingredients of a Feydeau farce, one might say, except that they are also stuffed with heartbreak and sexual suffering. Rereading them, you relish the craftsmanship, but then your eye is caught, once again, by something else. Birds, for instance. I had remembered ". . . and the rooks came out of the elms like bits of black paper," in "The Key to My Heart," but not "A soft owl flew over the lane." The short adjective, instead of the expected adverb, is art itself, and makes a place and a mood and a time of day, an entire scene, out of seven words.

Call back the interviewer. This is what we're looking for in the fiction line: We want that owl. ♦

PORTFOLIO

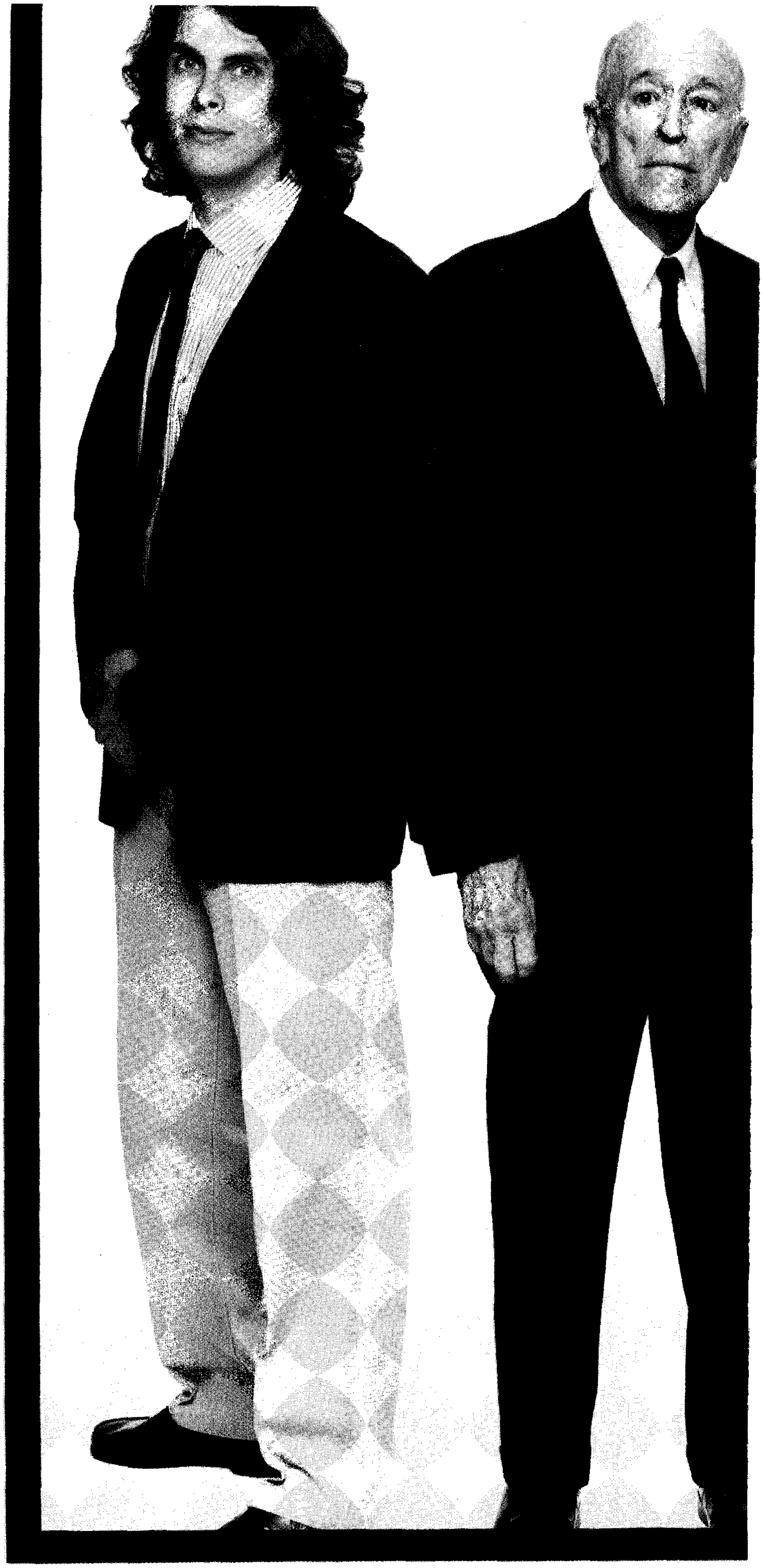
AUTHORS! AUTHORS!

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD AVEDON

LAST month, fourteen fiction writers closely associated with *The New Yorker* gathered in Manhattan to have their picture taken by our staff photographer, Richard Avedon, and then joined some of the magazine's editors for an on-location party. The event started at four o'clock in the afternoon and was over at about eight. Mr. Avedon sorted the fourteen into groups of four or five, and called these groups one at a time into a large, dark warehouselike room next to a smaller and brighter room, where the socializing took place. In the workroom was a stagelike platform, and each group spent about thirty minutes being photographed there. Then it was back into the bright room. As the party progressed, the guests began to change seats, so that they could talk to old friends or to people they had never met before. And when the party finally broke up, some went over to the Algonquin Hotel for a nightcap, while others moved on to a party downtown.

At the beginning of June, Mr. Avedon travelled to London, to photograph three more fiction writers. This smaller gathering—a tea party, of sorts—took place in a rented studio in the Clapham section of London. The results of these two sessions are presented on the next seven pages.

We regret that a number of writers couldn't join us, because of illness or previous plans, but the parties honored them, too. Both gatherings reminded us that writers do what they do not only to tell the rest of us what they see and what they know but to converse, implicitly, among themselves, and that, given the right circumstances, they will talk up a happy storm in person.



Michael Chabon, William Maxwell, Mavis Gallant, Bobbie Ann Mason, Haruki Murakami

Haruki Murakami, Ann Beattie, John Updike, Allegra Goodman, Nicholson Baker, Thom Jones, Jamaica Kincaid

Harold Brodkey, Alice Munro, Tom Drury, Edna O'Brien

William Trevor, V.S. Pritchett, Deborah Eisenberg

AFTER the camera work was over, the participants in the Manhattan photo-op/party kept coming up with analogies for it. They are writers, after all, and they spend their days trying to flush out accurate correspondences. "It was like a combination dinner party and conference and school photo," Allegra Goodman said. John Updike said the photo session was "like a police lineup," and William Maxwell, describing the whole afternoon, weighed in with "Somewhere between a circus and Commencement Day." Nicholson Baker said, "It seemed as if everything had just been whitewashed—it was so white that the whole gathering seemed afterworldly." And Michael Chabon, who, like Ms. Goodman, is young and currently of California, said, "It all reminded me of those comic-book-hero groups—the Justice League of America, or something. Of course, I was the Robin figure—Bucky the sidekick. Wait a minute, I'm getting D.C. Comics mixed up with Marvel."

All the guests at this event agreed that it was a day to remember. Alice Munro felt at home enough to take off her shoes. "They hurt," she said, "so I just took them off." She explained that she had worn those particular shoes "so I would look taller in the pictures." Jamaica Kincaid talked to Munro about a vase of flowers on a table. Together, they listed the horticultural names of the bouquet's components. Impressive. When John Updike saw Haruki Murakami standing alone, he went over to him and ambassadorially commenced conversation by complimenting his work and testing the thesis that Murakami couldn't have flown in all the way from Japan. He hadn't. Cambridge.

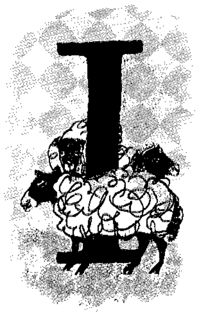
Maxwell said of Thom Jones, "I knew that he had been a boxer and that his stories were often about boxers, and my first good friend was a boxer, so I talked to him about boxers and asked if they fought because they were angry, hostile to the world. He said no, they were often gentle and frightened." Frightened of what? "Jones said that they're always afraid that they're going to get the shit beat out of them in the ring." Ann Beattie found it funny, in a melancholy way, to hear the two Canadians, Alice Munro and Mavis Gallant, recalling from their past stints as teachers the same kinds of privations she herself has suffered more recently. "They both talked about having to buy their own phones for their offices," she said. "I guess it never changes." Bobbie Ann Mason was startled and flattered to learn that Alice Munro and her husband had travelled through western Kentucky because they admired her work and wanted to see the region her stories describe. Tom Drury—along with nearly everyone else, it seemed—was delighted to meet Alice Munro at last; they have been carrying on a lively correspondence for months. Harold Brodkey admired the demeanor of one of his fellow-subjects. "How long have you been so happy?" he asked.

The setting was ur-New York—a place where the meatpacking district and industry and Greenwich Village brownstones converge. Sun flooded in through tall windows. High spirits prevailed even on the platform in the cavernous photography room. "Allegra, would you mind putting your hand on John's arm?" Richard Avedon asked. "But we only just met," she said, with a giddy laugh. There were a fair number of giggles during the shoot, along with some schoolroom self-consciousness. Come to think of it, there *was* something close to a common denominator among the similes that the guests used for this part of the party, and that was the trope of the yearbook photo. Makes sense, because how often do you find yourself lined up and coached by a photographer? And what are writers of fiction if not people who can observe and respond to the world with youthful wonder and curiosity? The yearbook-photograph comparison brings to mind other staples of graduation, particularly what used to be called "Superlatives." What categories would one use here? Most Arresting Imagery? Best Characterization Through Dialogue? Cleverest Chronology? Funniest Names? Done Most for Genre? In any case, it's one hell of a class.—DANIEL MENAKER

FICTION

THE ALBANIAN VIRGIN

BY ALICE MUNRO



IN the mountains, in Maltsia e madhe, she must have tried to tell them her name, and "Lottar" was what they made of it. She had a wound in her leg, from a fall on sharp rocks when her guide was shot. She had a fever. How long it took them to carry her through the mountains, bound up in a rug and strapped to a horse's back, she had no idea. They gave her water to drink now and then, and sometimes *rakia,* which was a kind of brandy, very strong. She could smell pines. At one time they were on a boat and she woke up and saw the stars, brightening and fading and changing places—unstable clusters that made her sick. Later she understood that they must have been on the lake. Lake Scutari, or Shkodër, or Shkodra. They pulled up among the reeds. The rug was full of vermin, which got under the rag tied around her leg.

At the end of her journey, though she did not know it was the end, she was lying in a small stone hut that was an outbuilding of the big house, called the *kula.* It was the hut of the sick and dying. Not of giving birth, which these women did in the cornfields, or beside the path when they were carrying a load to market.

She was lying, perhaps for weeks, on a heaped-up bed of ferns. It was comfortable, and had the advantage of being easily changed when fouled or bloodied. The old woman named Tima looked after her. She plugged up the wound with a paste made of beeswax and olive oil and pine resin. Several times a day the dressing was changed and the wound washed out with *rakia.* Lottar could see black lace curtains hanging from the rafters, and she thought she was in her room at home, with her mother (who was dead) looking after her. "Why have you hung up those curtains?" she said. "They look horrible."

She was really seeing cobwebs, all thick and furry with smoke—ancient cobwebs, never disturbed from year to year.

Also, in her delirium, she had the sensation of some wide board being pushed against her face—something like a coffin plank. But when she came to her senses she learned that it was nothing but a crucifix, a wooden crucifix that a man was trying to get her to kiss. The man was a priest, a Franciscan. He was a tall, fierce-looking man with black eyebrows and mustache and a rank smell, and he carried, besides the crucifix, a gun that she learned later was a Browning revolver. He knew by the look of her that she was a giaour—not a Muslim—but he did not understand that she might be a heretic. He knew a little English but pronounced it in a way that she could not make out. And she did not then know any of the language of the Ghegs. But after her fever subsided, when he tried a few words of Italian on her, they were able to talk, because she had learned Italian at school and had been travelling for six months in Italy. He understood so much more than anyone else around her that she expected him, at first, to understand everything. What is the nearest city? she asked him, and he said, Shkodra. So go there, please, she said—go and find the British Consulate, if there is one. I belong to the British Empire. Tell them I am here. Or if there is no British Consul, go to the police.

She did not understand that under no circumstances would anybody go to the police. She didn't know that she belonged now to this tribe, this *kula,* even though taking her prisoner had not been their intention and was an embarrassing mistake.

It is shameful beyond belief to attack a woman. When they had shot and killed her guide, they had thought that she would turn her horse around and fly back down the mountain road, back to Bar. But her horse took fright at the shot and stumbled among the boulders, and she fell, and her leg was injured. Then they had no choice but to carry her with them, back across the border between Crna Gora (which means Black Mountain, or Montenegro) and Maltsia e madhe.

"But why rob the guide and not me?" she said, naturally thinking robbery to be the motive. She thought of how starved they looked, the man and his horse, and of the fluttering white rags of his headdress.

"Oh, they are not robbers!" said the Franciscan, shocked. "They are honest men. They shot him because they were in blood with him. With his house. It is their law."

He told her that the man who had been shot, her guide, had killed a man of this *kula.* He had done that because the man he had killed had killed a man of his *kula.* This would go on, it had been going on for a long time now, there were always more sons being born. They think they have more sons than other people in the world, and it is to serve this necessity.

"Well, it is terrible," the Franciscan concluded. "But it is for their honor, the honor of their family. They are always ready to die for their honor."

She said that her guide did not seem to be so ready, if he had fled to Crna Gora.

"But it did not make any difference, did it?" said the Franciscan. "Even if he had gone to America, it would not have made any difference."

AT Trieste she had boarded a steamer, to travel down the Dalmatian Coast. She was with her friends Mr. and Mrs. Cozzens, whom she had met in Italy, and their friend Dr. Lamb, who had joined them from England. They put in at the little port of Bar, which the Italians call Antivari, and stayed the night at the European Hotel. After dinner they walked on the terrace, but Mrs. Cozzens was afraid of a chill, so they went indoors and played cards. There was rain in the night. She woke up and listened to the rain and was full of disappointment, which gave rise to a loathing for these middle-aged people, particularly for Dr. Lamb, whom she believed the Cozzenses had summoned from England to meet her. They probably thought she was rich. A transatlantic heiress whose accent they could almost forgive. These people ate too much and then they had to take pills. And they worried about being in strange places—what had they come for? In the morning she would have to get back on the boat with them or they would make a fuss. She would never take the road over the mountains to Cetinje, Montenegro's old capital city—they had been told that it was not wise. She would never see the bell tower where the heads of Turks used to hang, or the plane tree under which the Poet-Prince held audience with the people. She could not get back to sleep, so she decided to go downstairs with the first light, and, even if it was still raining, to go a little way up the road behind the town, just to see the ruins that she knew were there, among the olive trees, and the Austrian fortress on its rock and the dark face of Mt. Lovchen.

The weather obliged her, and so did the man at the hotel desk, producing almost at once a tattered but cheerful guide and his underfed horse. They set out—she on the horse, the man walking ahead. The road was steep and twisting and full of boulders, the sun increasingly hot, and the intervening shade cold and black. She became hungry and thought she must turn back soon. She would have breakfast with her companions, who got up late.

No doubt there was some sort of search for her, after the guide's body was found. The authorities must have been notified—whoever the authorities were. The boat must have sailed on time, her friends must have gone with it. The hotel had not taken their passports. Nobody back in Canada would think of investigating. She was not writing regularly to anyone, she had had a falling out with her brother, her parents were dead. You won't come home till all your inheritance is spent, her brother had said, and then who will look after you?

When she was being carried through the pine forest, she awoke and found herself suspended, lulled—in spite of the pain and perhaps because of the *rakia*—into a disbelieving surrender. She fastened her eyes on the bundle that was hanging from the saddle of the man ahead of her and knocking against the horse's back. It was something about the size of a cabbage, wrapped in a stiff and rusty-looking cloth.

I HEARD this story in the old St. Joseph's Hospital in Victoria from Charlotte, who was the sort of friend I had in my early days there. My friendships then seemed both intimate and uncertain. I never knew why people told me things, or what they meant me to believe.

I had come to the hospital with flowers and chocolates. Charlotte lifted her head, with its clipped and feathery white hair, toward the roses. "Bah!" she said. "They have no smell! Not to me, anyway. They are beautiful, of course.

"You must eat the chocolates yourself," she said. "Everything tastes like tar to me. I don't know how I know what tar tastes like, but this is what I think."

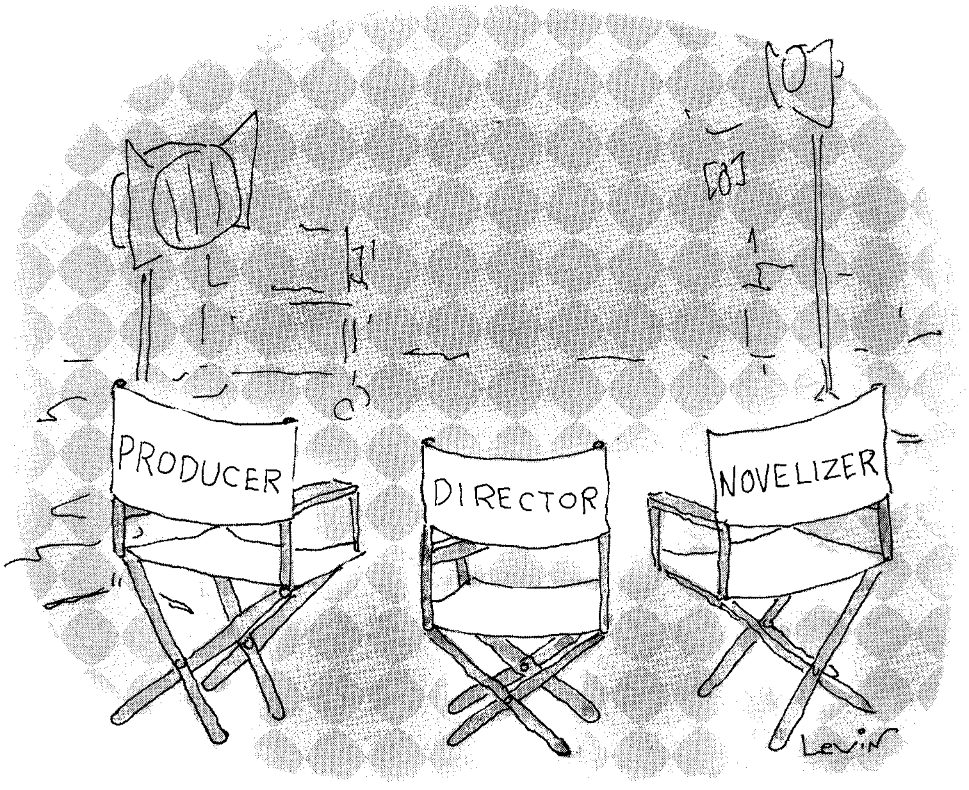
She was feverish. Her hand, when I held it, felt hot and puffy. Most of her hair had been cut off, and this made her look as if she had actually lost flesh around her face and neck. The part of her under the hospital covers seemed as extensive and lumpy as ever.

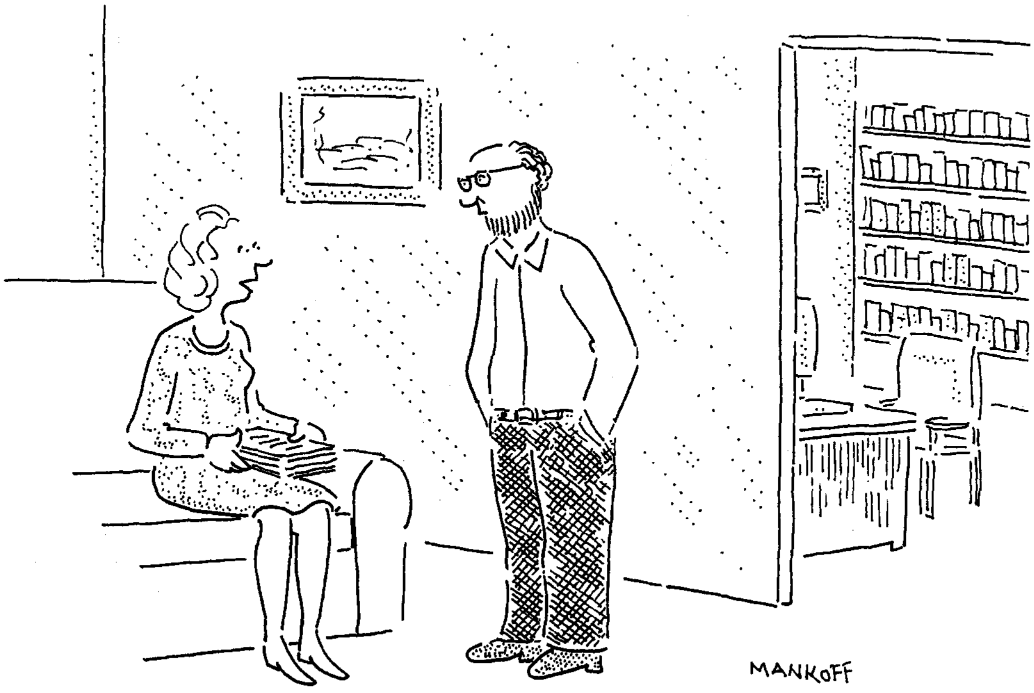
"But you must not think I am ungrateful," she said. "Sit down. Bring that chair from over there—she doesn't need it."

There were two other women in the room. One was just a thatch of yellow-gray hair on the pillow, and the other was tied into a chair, wriggling and grunting.

"This is a terrible place," said Charlotte. "But we must just try our best to put up with it. I am so glad to see you. That one over there yells all night long." She nodded toward the window bed. "We must thank Christ she's asleep now. I don't get a wink of sleep, but I have been putting the time to very good use. What do you think I've been doing? I've been making up a story, for a movie! I have it all in my head and I want you to hear it. You will be able to judge if it will make a good movie. I think it will. I would like Jennifer Jones to act in it. I don't know, though. She does not seem to have the same spirit anymore. She married that mogul.

"Listen," she said. "(Oh, could you haul that pillow up more, behind my head?) It takes place in Albania, in northern Albania, which is called Maltsia e madhe. It's about a woman travelling alone there. Back when I was





"Well—and I'm not just saying this because you're my husband—it stinks."

• •

young. Lottar is her name in the story."

I sat and listened. Charlotte would lean forward, even rock a little on her hard bed, stressing some point for me. Her puffy hands flew up and down, her blue eyes widened commandingly, and then from time to time she sank back onto the pillows, and she shut her eyes to get the story in focus again. Ah, yes, she said. Yes, yes. And she continued.

"Yes, yes," she said at last. "I know how it goes on, but that is enough for now. You will have to come back. Tomorrow. Will you come back?"

I said, yes, tomorrow, but she appeared to have fallen asleep without hearing me.

The *kula* was a great, rough stone house with a stable below and the living quarters above. A veranda ran all the way around, and there would always be an old woman sitting there, with a bobbin contraption that flew like a bird from one hand to the other and left a trail of shiny black braid, mile after mile of black braid, which was the adornment of the men's trousers. Other women worked at the looms or sewed together the leather sandals. Nobody sat there knitting, because nobody would think to sit down to knit. Knitting was what they did while they trotted back and forth to the spring with their water barrels strapped to their backs, or took the path to the fields or to the beech wood, where they collected the fallen branches. They knitted stockings—black and white, red and white, with zigzag patterns like lightning strokes. Women's hands must never be idle. Before dawn, they pounded the bread dough in its blackened wooden trough, shaped it into loaves on the backs of shovels, and baked it on the hearth. (It was maize bread, unleavened and eaten hot, which would swell up like a puffball in your stomach.) Then they had to sweep out the *kula* and dump the dirty ferns and pile up armloads of fresh ferns for the next night's sleep. This was often one of Lottar's jobs, since she was so unskilled at everything else. Little girls stirred the yogurt so that lumps would not form as it soured. Older girls might butcher a kid and sew up its stomach, which they had stuffed with wild garlic and sage and apples. Or they would go together, girls and women, all ages, to wash the men's white head scarves in the cold little river nearby, whose waters were clear as glass. They tended the tobacco crop and hung the ripe leaves to dry in the darkened shed. They hoed the corn and cucumbers, milked the ewes.

The women looked stern but they were not so, really. They were only preoccupied, and proud of themselves, and eager for competition. Who could carry the heaviest load of wood, knit the fastest, hoe the most rows of cornstalks? Tima, who had looked after Lottar when she was sick, was the most spectacular worker of all. She would run up the slope to the *kula* with a load of wood, bound to her back, that looked ten times as big as herself. She would leap from rock to rock in the river and pound the scarves as if they were the bodies of enemies. "Oh, Tima, Tima!" the other women cried out in ironic admiration, and "Oh, Lottar, Lottar!" in nearly the same tones, when Lottar, at the other end of a scale of usefulness, let the clothes drift away downstream. Sometimes they whacked Lottar with a stick, as they would a donkey, but this had more exasperation in it than cruelty. Sometimes the young ones would say, "Talk your talk!" and for their entertainment she would speak English. They wrinkled up their faces and spat, at such peculiar sounds. She tried to teach them words—"hand," "nose," and so on. But these seemed to them jokes, and they would repeat them to each other and fall about laughing.

Women were with women and men were with men, except at times in the night (women teased about such times were full of shame and denial, and sometimes there would be a slapping) and at meals, when the women served the men their food. What men did all day was none of women's business. Men made their ammunition, and gave a lot of care to their guns, which were in some cases very beautiful, decorated with engraved silver. They also dynamited rocks to clear the road, and were responsible for the horses. Wherever they were, there was a lot of laughing, and sometimes singing and firing off of blanks. While they were at home they seemed to be on holiday, and then some of them would have to ride off on an expedition of punishment, or to attend a council called to put an end to some particular bout of killing. None of the women believed it would work—they laughed and said that it would only mean twenty more shot. When a young man was going off on his first killing, the women made a great fuss over his clothes and his haircut, to encourage him. If he didn't succeed, no woman would marry him—a woman of any worth would be ashamed to marry a man who had not killed—and everyone was anxious to have new brides in the house, to help with the work.

One night, when Lottar served one man his food—a guest; there were always guests invited for meals around the low table, the *sofra*—she noticed what small hands he had, and hairless wrists. Yet he was not young, he was not a boy. A wrinkled, leathery face, without a mustache. She listened for his voice in the talk, and it seemed to her hoarse but womanish. But he smoked, he ate with the men, he carried a gun.

"Is that a man?" Lottar said to the woman serving with her. The woman shook her head, not willing to speak where the men might hear them. But the young girls who overheard the question were not so careful. "Is that a man? Is that a man?" they mimicked Lottar. "Oh, Lottar, you are so stupid! Don't you know when you see a Virgin?"

So she did not ask them anything else. But the next time she saw the Franciscan, she ran after him to ask him her question. What is a Virgin? She had to run after him, because he did not stop and talk to her now, as he had when she was sick in the little hut. She was always working when he came to the *kula*, and he could not spend much time with the women, anyway—he sat with the men. She ran after him when she saw him leaving, striding down the path among the sumac trees, heading for the bare wooden church and the lean-to church house, where he lived.

He said it was a woman, but a woman who had become like a man. She did not want to marry, and she took an oath in front of witnesses that she never would, and then she put on men's clothes and had her own gun, and her horse if she could afford one, and she lived as she liked. Usually she was poor, she had no woman to work for her. But nobody troubled her, and she could eat at the *sofra* with the men.

Lottar no longer spoke to the priest about going to Shkodra. She understood now that it must be a long way away. Sometimes she asked if he had heard anything, if anybody was looking for her, and he would say, sternly, no one. When she thought of how she had been during those first weeks—giving orders, speaking English without embarrassment, sure that her special case merited attention—she was ashamed at how little she had understood. And the longer she stayed at the *kula*, the better she spoke the language and became accustomed to the work, the stranger was the thought of leaving. Someday she must go, but how could it be now? How could she leave in the middle of the tobacco-picking or the sumac harvest, or during the preparations for the feast of the Translation of St. Nicholas?

In the tobacco fields they took off their jerkins and blouses and worked half naked in the sun, hidden between the rows of tall plants. The tobacco juice was black and sticky, like molasses, and it ran down their arms and was smeared over their breasts. At dusk they went down to the river and scrubbed themselves clean. They splashed in the cold water, girls and big, broad women together. They tried to push each other off balance, and Lottar heard her name cried then, in warning and triumph, without contempt, like any other name: "Lottar, watch out! Lottar!"

They told her things. They told her that children died here because of the *Shtriga*. Even grown-up people shrivel and die sometimes, when the *Shtriga* has put her spell on them. The *Shtriga* looks like a normal woman, so you do not know who she is. She sucks blood. To catch her, you must lay a cross on the threshold of the church on Easter Sunday when everybody is inside. Then the woman who is the *Shtriga* cannot come out. Or you can follow the woman you suspect, and you may see her vomit up the blood. If you can manage to scrape up some of this blood on a silver coin, and carry that coin with you, no *Shtriga* can touch you, ever.

Hair cut at the time of the new moon will turn white.

If a *Shtriga* gives you pains in your

THE WRITER'S TOWN: 1941

Another policeman, from over by Whelan's drugstore, where there was a picket line, strolled up. He was an older cop, more lines in his face, bigger belly, less humps around his hips, because the equipment—twisters, mace, and all that stuff—fitted on him better after all these years. "Wuzzamadder with 'im?" he asked his colleague.

"This here truck hit him. He isn't hurt bad. Says he's an atheist."

"I *am* an atheist!" the man yelled.

The crowd laughed again.

"Did you put that down—atheist?" the older cop asked.

"Yuh, I put it in where it says 'religion.' "

"Rubbid out. Rubbid out. Put in Cat'lic. He looks like a Cat'lic to me. He got an Irish name? Anyway, rubbid out. When he sobers up, he'll be sorry he said that atheist business. Put in Cat'lic. We gotta send him to Bellevue just for safety's sake." The young cop started for the drugstore to put in a call.

"Never mind safety's sake. I'm an atheist, I'm telling you," the drunk said, loud as he could.

"Cuddid out, cuddid out," the older cop said. Then he leaned over like a lecturer or somebody. "An' another thing—if you wouldn't go round sayin' you're an atheist, maybe you wouldn't be gettin' hit by trucks."

The crowd sensed a great moral lesson and didn't laugh.

"Jeez! The guy says he's an atheist," the hackie said again.

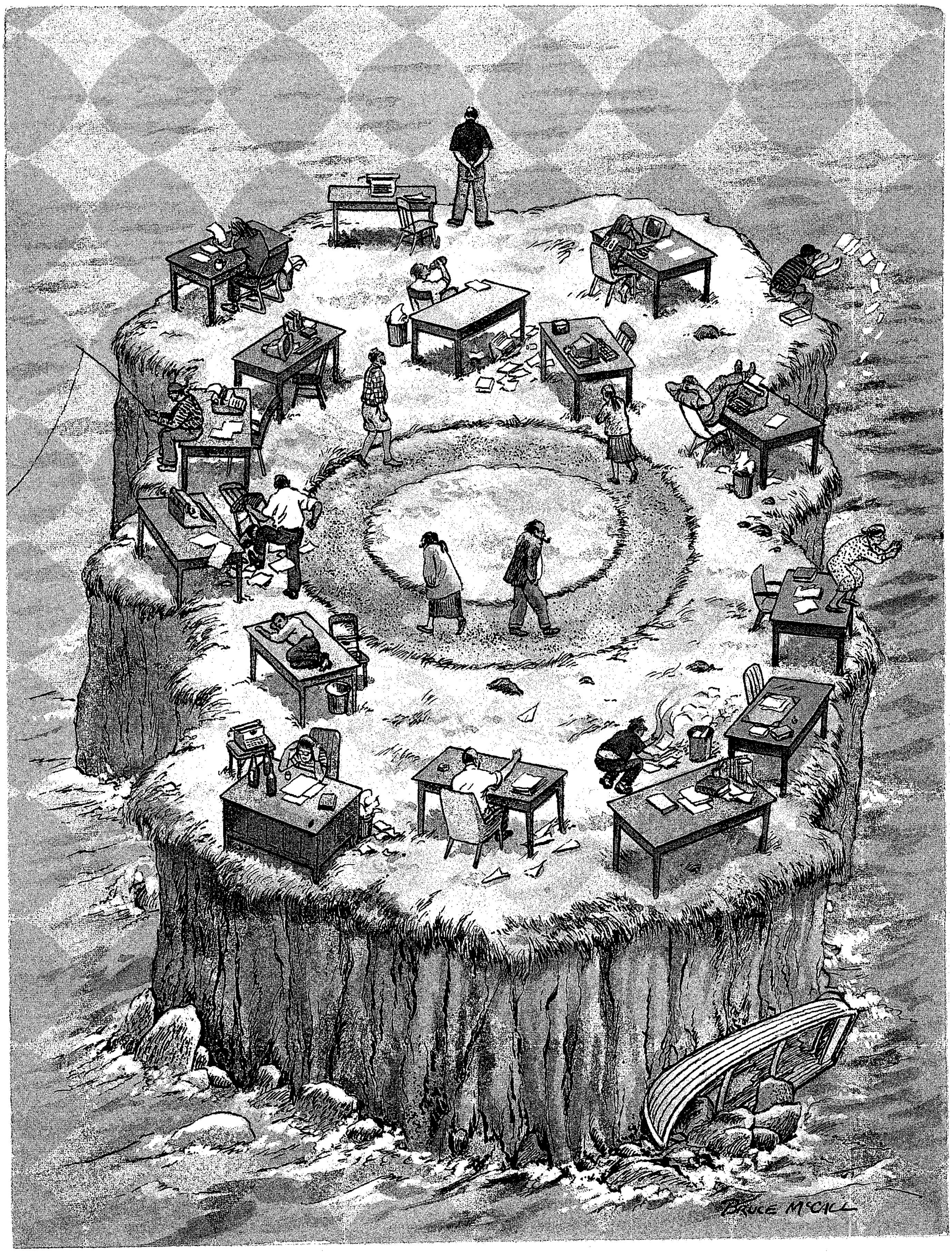
A little later the Bellevue ambulance came.

"I yam a natheist," the man kept muttering as they put him into the ambulance.

From "Atheist Hit by Truck"
by John McNulty

ARTIST'S NOTEBOOK · BY BRUCE McCALL

BLOCK ISLAND


BRUCE McCALL

limbs, cut some hair from your head and your armpits and burn it—then the pains will go away.

The *oras* are the devils that come out at night and flash false lights to bewilder travellers. You must crouch down and cover your head, else they will lead you over a cliff. Also they will catch the horses and ride them to death.

THE tobacco had been harvested, the sheep brought down from the slopes, animals and humans shut up in the *kula* through the weeks of snow and cold rain, and one day, in the early warmth of the spring sun, the women brought Lottar to a chair on the veranda. There, with great ceremony and delight, they shaved off the hair above her forehead. Then they combed some black, bubbling dye through the hair that remained. The dye was greasy—the hair became so stiff that they could shape it into wings and buns as firm as blood puddings. Everybody thronged about, criticizing and admiring. They put flour on her face and dressed her up in clothes they had pulled out of one of the great carved chests. What for, she asked, as she found herself disappearing into a white blouse with gold embroidery, a red bodice with fringed epaulets, a sash of striped silk a yard wide and a dozen yards long, a black-and-red wool skirt, with chain after chain of false gold being thrown over her hair and around her neck. For beauty, they said. And they said when they had finished, "See! She is beautiful!" Those who said it seemed triumphant, challenging others who must have doubted that the transformation could be made. They squeezed the muscles in her arms, which she had got from hoeing and woodcarrying, and patted her broad, floured forehead. Then they shrieked, because they had forgotten a very important thing—the black paint that joins the eyebrows in a single line over the nose.

"The priest is coming!" shouted one of the girls, who must have been placed as a lookout, and the woman who was painting the black line said, "Ha, he will not stop it!" But the others drew aside.

The Franciscan shot off a couple of blanks, as he always did to announce his arrival, and the men of the house fired off blanks also, to welcome him. But he did not stay with the men this time. He climbed at once to the veranda, calling, "Shame! Shame! Shame on you all! Shame!

"I know what you have dyed her hair for," he said to the women. "I know why you have put bride's clothes on her. All for a pig of a Muslim!

"You! You sitting there in your paint," he said to Lottar. "Don't you know what it is for? Don't you know they have sold you to a Muslim? He is coming from Vuthaj. He will be here by dark!"

"So what of it?" said one of the women boldly. "All they could get for her was three napoleons. She has to marry somebody."

The Franciscan told her to hold her tongue. "Is this what you want?" he said to Lottar. "To marry an infidel and go to live with him in Vuthaj?"

Lottar said no. She felt as if she could hardly move or open her mouth, under the weight of her greased hair and her finery. Under this weight she struggled as you do to rouse yourself to a danger, out of sleep. The idea of marrying the Muslim was still too distant to be the danger—what she understood was that she would be separated from the priest, and would never be able to claim an explanation from him again.

"Did you know you were being married?" he asked her. "Is it something you want, to be married?"

No, she said. No. And the Franciscan clapped his hands. "Take off that gold trash!" he said. "Take those clothes off her! I am going to make her a Virgin!

"If you become a Virgin, it will be all right," he said to her. "The Muslim will not have to shoot anybody. But you must swear you will never go with a man. You must swear in front of witnesses. *Per guri e per kruch.* By the stone and by the cross. Do you understand that? I am not going to let them marry you to a Muslim, but I do not want more shooting to start on this land."

It was one of the things the Franciscan tried so hard to prevent—the selling of women to Muslim men. It put him into a frenzy, that their religion could be so easily set aside. They sold girls like Lottar, who would bring no price anywhere else, and widows who had borne only girls.

Slowly and sulkily, the women removed all the rich clothes. They brought out men's trousers, worn and with no braid, and a shirt and head scarf. Lottar put them on. One woman with an ugly pair of shears chopped off most of what remained of Lottar's hair, which was difficult to cut because of the dressing.

"Tomorrow, you would have been a bride," they said to her. Some of them seemed mournful, some contemptuous. "Now you will never have a son."

The little girls snatched up the hair that had been cut off and stuck it on their heads, arranging various knots and fringes.

Lottar swore her oath in front of twelve witnesses. They were, of course, all men, and looked as sullen as the women about the turn things had taken. She never saw the Muslim. The Franciscan berated the men and said that if this sort of thing did not stop he would close up the churchyard and make them bury their dead in unholy ground. Lottar sat at a distance from them all, in her unaccustomed clothes. It was strange and unpleasant to be idle. When the Franciscan had finished his harangue, he came over and stood looking down at her. He was breathing hard because of his rage, or the exertions of the lecture.

"Well, then," he said. "Well." He reached into some inner fold of his clothing and brought out a cigarette and gave it to her. It smelled of his skin.

A NURSE had brought in Charlotte's supper, a light meal of soup and canned peaches. Charlotte took the cover off the soup, smelled it, and turned her head away. "Go away, don't look at this slop," she said. "Come back tomorrow—you know it's not finished yet."

The nurse walked with me to the door, and once we were in the corridor she said, "It's always the ones with the least at home who turn the most critical. She's not the easiest in the world, but you can't help kind of admiring her. You're not related, are you?"

Oh, no, I said. No.

"When she came in it was amazing. We were taking her things off and somebody said, Oh, what lovely bracelets, and right away she wanted to sell them! Her *husband* is something else. Do you know him? They are really quite the characters."

Charlotte's husband, Gjurdhi, had come to my bookstore by himself one cold morning less than a week earlier. He was pulling a wagon, full of books that he had wrapped up in a blanket. He had tried to sell me some books once before, in their apartment, and I thought perhaps these were the same ones. I had been confused then, but now that I was on my own ground I was able to be more forceful. I said no, I did not handle secondhand books, I was not interested. Gjurdhi nodded brusquely, as if I had not needed to tell him this and it was of no importance to our conversation. He continued to pick up the books one by one, urging me to run my hands over the bindings, insisting that I note the beauty of the illustrations and be impressed by the dates of publication. I had to repeat my refusal over and over again, and I heard myself begin to attach some apologies to it, quite against my own will. He chose to understand each rejection as applying to an individual book and would simply fetch out another, saying vehemently, "This, too! This is very beautiful. You will notice. And it is very old. Look, what a beautiful old book!"

They were travel books, some of them, from the turn of the century. Not so very old, and not so beautiful, either, with their dim, grainy photographs. "A Trek Through the Black Peaks." "High Albania." "Secret Lands of Southern Europe."

"You will have to go to the antiquarian bookstore," I said. "The one on Fort Street. It isn't far to take them."

He made a sound of disgust, maybe indicating that he knew well enough where it was, or that he had already made an unsuccessful trip there, or that most of these books had come from there, one way or another, in the first place.

"How is Charlotte?" I said warmly. I had not seen her for a while, although she used to visit the store quite often. She would bring me little presents—coffee beans coated with chocolate to give me energy; a bar of glycerine soap to counteract the drying effects, on the skin, of having to handle so much paper. A paperweight embedded with samples of rocks found in British Columbia, a pencil that lit up in the dark (so that I could see to write up bills if the lights should go out). She drank coffee with me, talked, and strolled about the store, discreetly occupied, when I was busy. Through the dark, blustery days of fall she wore the velvet cloak that I had first seen her in, and kept the rain off with an oversized, ancient black umbrella. She called it her tent. If she saw that I had become too involved with a customer, she would rap me on the shoulder and say, "I'll just silently steal away with my tent now. We'll talk another day."

Once, a customer said to me bluntly, "Who is that woman? I've seen her around town with her husband. I guess he's her husband. I thought they were peddlers."

Could Charlotte have heard that, I wondered. Could she have detected a coolness in the attitude of my new clerk? (Charlotte was certainly cool to her.) There might have been just too many times when I was busy. I did not actually think that the visits had stopped. I preferred to think that an interval had grown longer, for a reason that might have nothing to do with me. I was busy and tired, anyway, as Christmas loomed. The number of books I was selling was a pleasant surprise.

"I don't want to be any kind of character assassin," the clerk had said to me. "But I think you should know that that woman and her husband have been banned from a lot of stores in town. They're suspected of lifting things. I don't know. He wears that rubber coat with the big sleeves and she's got her cloak. I do know for sure that they used to go around at Christmastime and snip off holly that was growing in people's gardens. Then they took it round and tried to sell it in apartment buildings."

On that cold morning, after I had refused all the books in his wagon, I asked Gjurdhi again how Charlotte was. He said that she was sick. He spoke sullenly, as if it were none of my business.

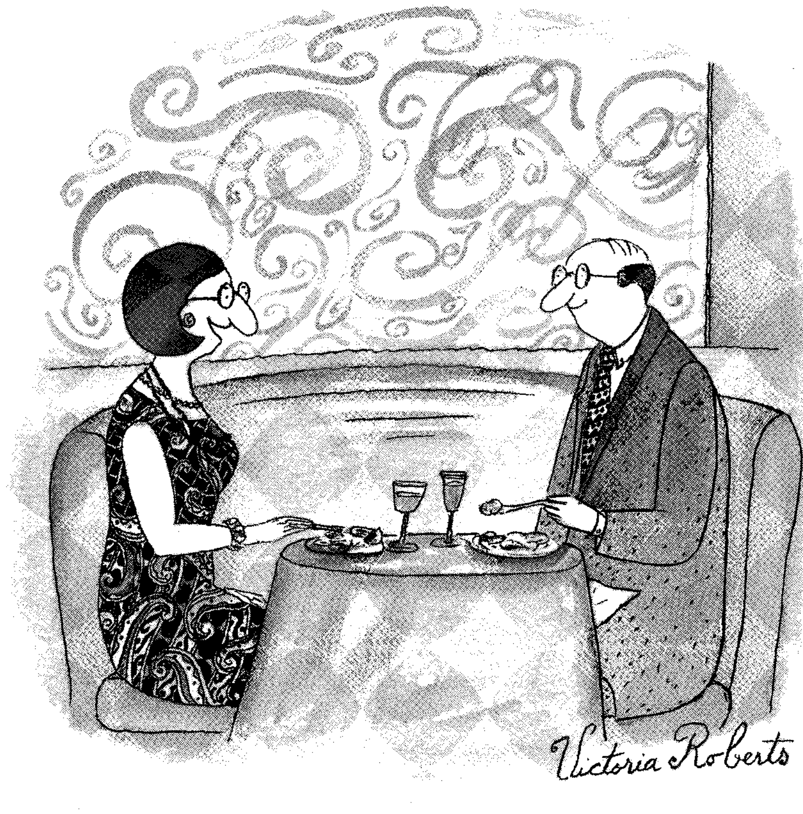
"Take her a book," I said. I picked out a Penguin light verse. "Take her this—tell her I hope she enjoys it. Tell her I hope she'll be better very soon. Perhaps I can get around to see her."

He put the book into his bundle in the wagon. I thought that he would probably try to sell it immediately.

"Not at home," he said. "In the hospital."

I had noticed, each time he bent over the wagon, a large, wooden crucifix that swung down outside his coat and had to be tucked back inside. Now this happened again, and I said, thoughtlessly, in my confusion and contrition, "Isn't that beautiful! What beautiful dark wood! It looks medieval."

He pulled it over his head, saying, "Very old. Very beautiful. Oak wood. Yes."



"I'm talking so much about books I haven't read I feel like I'm back in publishing."

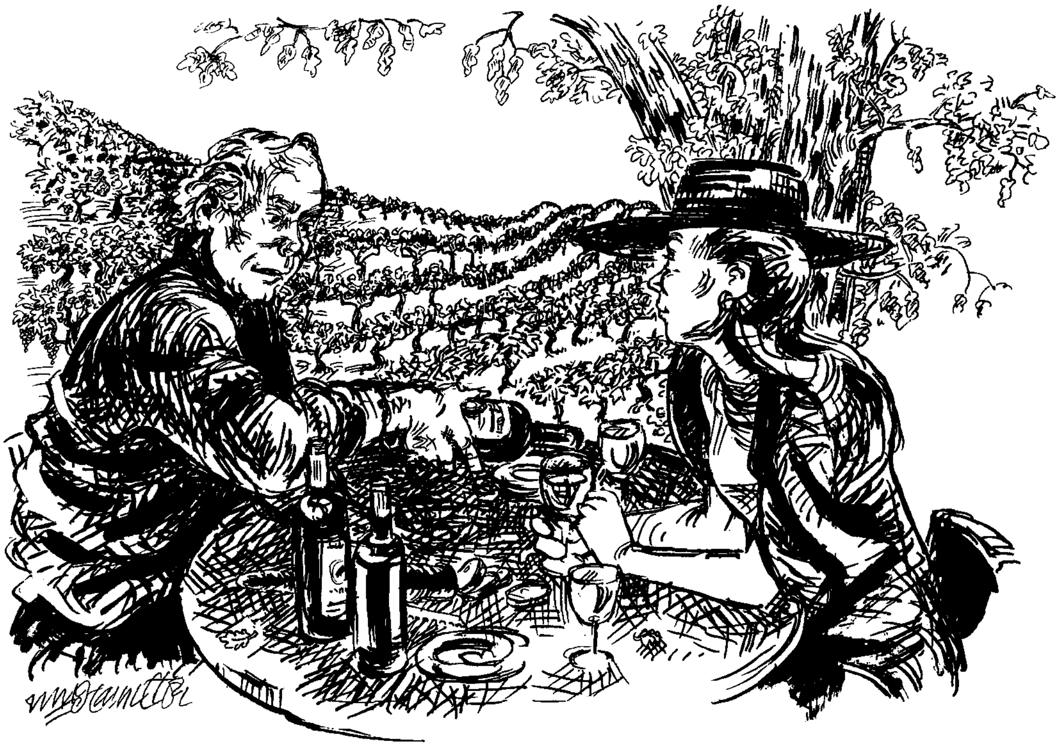
He pushed it into my hand, and as soon as I realized what was happening I pushed it back.

"*Wonderful* wood," I said. As he put it away I felt rescued, though full of irritable remorse.

"Oh, I hope Charlotte is not very sick!" I said.

He smiled disdainfully, tapping himself on the chest—perhaps to show me the source of Charlotte's trouble, perhaps only to feel for himself the skin that was newly bared there.

Then he took himself, the crucifix, the books, and the wagon out of my store. I felt that insults had been offered, humiliations suffered, on both sides.



"Then the demons that drove me to Tangier to try to write fiction turned around and drove me to the Napa Valley to make wine."

• •

UP past the tobacco field was a beech wood, where Lottar had often gone to get sticks for the fire. Beyond that was a grassy slope—a high meadow—and at the top of the meadow, about half an hour's climb from the *kula,* was a small stone shelter, a primitive place with no window, a low doorway and no door, a corner hearth without a chimney. Sheep took cover there; the floor was littered with their droppings.

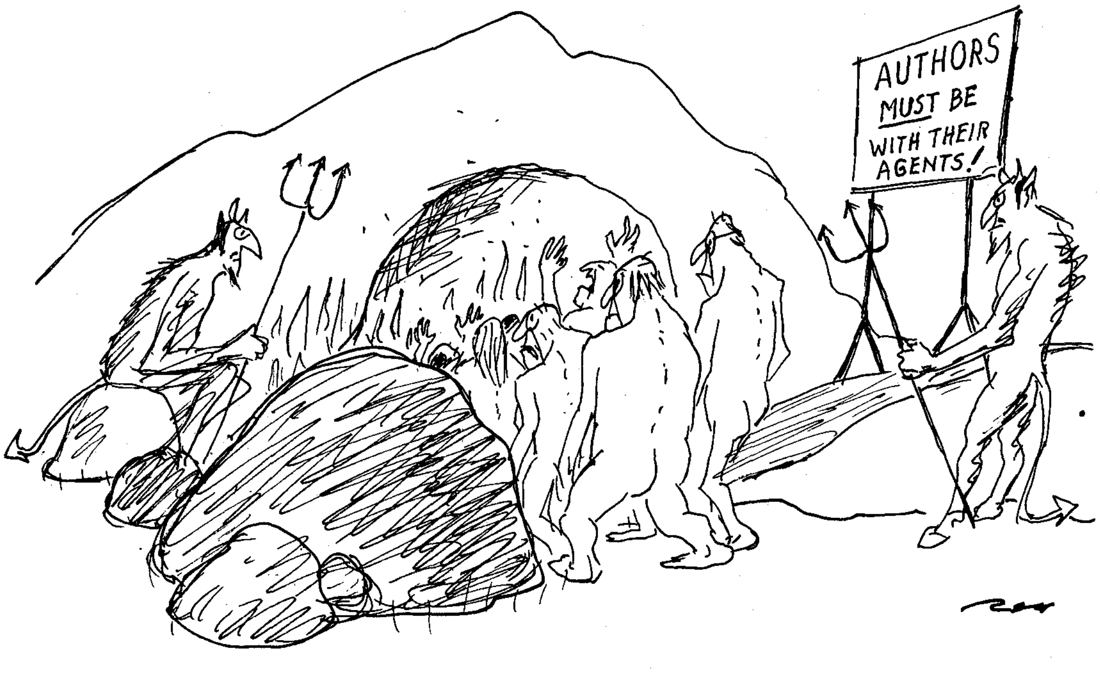
That was where she went to live after she became a Virgin. The incident of the Muslim bridegroom had taken place in the spring, just about a year after she first came to Maltsia e madhe, and it was time for the sheep to be driven to their higher pastures. Lottar was to keep count of the flock and see that they did not fall into ravines or wander too far away. And she was to milk the ewes every evening. She was expected to shoot wolves, if any came near. But none did, no one alive now at the *kula* had ever seen a wolf. The only wild animals Lottar saw were a red fox, once, by the stream, and the rabbits, which were plentiful and unwary. She learned to shoot and skin and cook them, cleaning them out as she had seen the butcher girls do at the *kula,* and stewing the meatier parts in her pot over the fire, with some bulbs of wild garlic.

She did not want to sleep inside the shelter, so she fixed up a roof of branches outside, against the wall, this roof an extension of the roof of the building. She had her heap of ferns underneath, and a felt rug she had been given, to spread on the ferns when she slept. She no longer took any notice of the bugs. There were some spikes pushed into the wall between the dry stones. She did not know why they were there, but they served her well for hanging up the milk pails and the few pots she had been provided with. She brought her water from the stream, in which she washed her own head scarf, and herself sometimes, more for relief from the heat than out of concern about her dirtiness.

Everything was changed. She no longer saw the women. She lost her habits of constant work. The little girls came up in the evenings to get the milk. This far away from the *kula* and their mothers, they became quite wild. They climbed up on the roof, often smashing through the arrangement of branches which Lottar had contrived. They jumped into the ferns and sometimes snatched an armful of them to bind into a crude ball, which they threw at one another until it fell apart. They enjoyed themselves so much that Lottar had to chase them away at dusk, reminding them of how frightened they got in the beech wood after dark. She believed that they ran all the way through it and spilled half the milk on their way.

Now and then they brought her corn flour, which she mixed with water and baked on her hearthstone by the fire. Once they had a treat, a sheep's head—she wondered if they had stolen it—for her to boil in her pot. She was allowed to keep some of the milk, and instead of drinking it fresh she usually let it go sour, and stirred it to make yogurt to dip her bread in. That was how she preferred it now.

The men often came up through the wood shortly after the little girls had run through it on their way down. It seemed that this was a custom of theirs, in the summer. They liked to sit on the banks of the stream and fire off blanks and drink *rakia* and sing, or sometimes just smoke and talk. They were not making this expedition to see how she was getting on. But since they were coming anyway, they brought her presents of coffee and tobacco and were full of competing advice on how to fix up the roof


AUTHORS MUST BE WITH THEIR AGENTS!

of her shelter so it wouldn't fall down, how to keep her fire going all night, how to use her gun.

Her gun was an old Martini, which had been given to her when she left the *kula*. Some of the men said that gun was unlucky, since it had belonged to a boy who had been killed before he himself had even shot anybody. Others said that Martinis in general were unlucky, hardly any use at all.

Mausers were what you needed, for accuracy and repeating power.

But Mauser bullets were too small to do enough damage. There were men walking around full of Mauser holes—you could hear them whistle as they passed by.

For shooting at close range, nothing can really compare with a heavy flintlock that has a good packing of powder, a bullet, and nails.

When they weren't talking about guns, the men spoke of recent killings and told jokes. One of them told a joke about a wizard. There was a wizard held in prison by a pasha. The pasha brought him out to do tricks in front of guests. Bring a bowl of water, said the wizard. Now, this water is the sea. And what port shall I show you on the sea? Show a port on the island of Malta, they said. And there it was. Houses and churches and a steamer ready to sail. Now would you like to see me step on board that steamer? And the pasha laughed. Go ahead! So the wizard put his foot in the bowl of water and stepped on board the steamer and went to America! What do you think of that!

"There are no wizards, anyway," said the Franciscan, who had climbed up with the men on this evening, as he often did. "If you had said a saint, you might have made some sense." He spoke severely, but Lottar thought he was happy, as they all were, as she, too, was permitted to be, in their presence and in his, though he paid no attention to her. The strong tobacco that they gave her to smoke made her dizzy and she had to lie down on the grass.

THE time came when Lottar had to think about moving inside her house. The mornings were cold, the ferns were soaked with dew, and the grape leaves were turning yellow. She took the shovel and cleaned the sheep droppings off the floor, in preparation for making up her bed inside. She began to stuff grass and leaves and mud into the chinks between the stones.

When the men came they asked her what she was doing that for. For the winter, she said, and they laughed.

"Nobody can stay here in the winter," they said. They showed her how deep the snow was, putting hands against their breastbones. Besides, all the sheep would have been taken down.

"There will be no work for you—and what will you eat?" they said. "Do you think the women will let you have bread and yogurt for nothing?"

"How can I go back to the *kula*?" Lottar said. "I am a Virgin, where would I sleep? What kind of work would I do?"

"That is right," they said kindly, speaking to her and then to one another. "When a Virgin belongs to the *kula* she gets a bit of land, usually, where she can live on her own. But this one doesn't really belong to the *kula*, she has no father to give her anything. What will she do?"

Shortly after this—and in the middle of the day, when visitors never came—the Franciscan climbed the meadow, all alone.

"I don't trust them," he said. "I think they will try again to sell you to a Muslim. Even though you have been sworn. They will try to make some money out of you. If they could find you a Christian, it might not be so bad, but I am sure it will be an infidel."

They sat on the grass and drank coffee. The Franciscan said, "Do you have any belongings to take with you? No. Soon we will start."

"Who will milk the ewes?" said Lottar. Some of the ewes were already working their way down the slope; they would stand and wait for her.

"Leave them," said the Franciscan.

In this way she left not only the sheep but her shelter, the meadow, the wild grape and the sumac and mountain ash and juniper bushes and scrub oak she had looked at all summer, the rabbit pelt she had used as a pillow and the pan she had boiled her coffee in, the heap of wood she had gathered only that morning, the stones around her fire—each one of them known to her by its particular shape and color. She understood that she was leaving, because the Franciscan was so stern, but she did not understand it in a way that would make her look around, to see everything for the last time. That was not necessary, anyway. She would never forget any of it.

As they entered the beech wood, the

Franciscan said, "Now we must be very quiet. I am going to take another path, which does not go so near the *kula*. If we hear anybody on the path, we will hide."

Hours, then, of silent walking, between the beech trees with their smooth elephant bark, and the black-limbed oaks and the dry pines. Up and down, crossing the ridges, choosing paths that Lottar had not known existed. The Franciscan never hesitated and never spoke of a rest. When they came out of the trees at last, Lottar was very surprised to see that there was still so much light in the sky.

The Franciscan pulled a loaf of bread and a knife from some pocket in his garment, and they ate as they walked.

They came to a dry riverbed, paved with stones that were not flat and easily walkable but a torrent, a still torrent of stones between fields of corn and tobacco. They could hear dogs barking, and sometimes people's voices. The corn and tobacco plants, still unharvested, were higher than their heads, and they walked along the dry river in this shelter, while the daylight entirely faded. When they could not walk anymore and the darkness concealed them, they sat down on the white stones of the riverbed.

"Where are you taking me?" Lottar finally asked. At the start she had thought they must be going in the direction of the church and the priest's house, but now she saw that this could not be so. They had come much too far.

"I am taking you to the Bishop's house," said the Franciscan. "He will know what to do with you."

"Why not to your house?" said Lottar. "I could be a servant in your house."

"It isn't allowed—to have a woman servant in my house. Or in any priest's house. This Bishop now will not allow even an old woman. And he is right, trouble comes from having a woman in the house."

After the moon rose they went on. They walked and rested, walked and rested, but never fell asleep, or even looked for a comfortable place to lie down. Their feet were tough and their sandals well worn, and they did not get blisters. Both of them were used to walking long distances, the Franciscan in his far-flung parish and Lottar when she was following the sheep.

The Franciscan became less stern—perhaps less worried—after a while and talked to her almost as he had done in the first days of their acquaintance. He spoke Italian, though she was now fairly proficient in the language of the Ghegs.

"I was born in Italy," he said. "My parents were Ghegs, but I lived in Italy when I was young, and that was where I became a priest. Once I went back for a visit, years ago, and I shaved off my mustache, I do not know why. Oh, yes, I do know—it was because they laughed at me in the village. Then when I got back I did not dare show my face in the *madhe*. A hairless man there is a disgrace. I sat in a room in Shkodra until it grew again."

"It is Shkodra we are going to?" said Lottar.

"Yes, that is where the Bishop is. He will send a message that it was right to take you away, even if it is an act of stealing. They are barbarians, in the *madhe*. They will come up and pull on your sleeve in the middle of Mass and ask you to write a letter for them. Have you seen what they put up on the graves? The crosses? They make the cross into a very thin man with a rifle across his arms. Haven't you seen that?" He laughed and shook his head and said, "I don't know what to do with them. But they are good people all the same—they will never betray you."

"But you thought they might sell me in spite of my oath."

"Oh, yes. But to sell a woman is a way to get some money. And they are so poor."

Lottar now realized that in Shkodra she would be in an unfamiliar position—she would not be powerless. When they got there, she could run away from him. She could find someone who spoke English, she could find the British Consulate. Or, if not that, the French.

The grass was soaking wet before dawn, and the night got very cold. But when the sun came up, Lottar stopped shivering, and within an hour she was hot. They walked on all day. They ate the rest of the bread and drank from any stream they found that had water in it. They had left the dry river and the mountains far behind. Lottar looked back and saw a wall of jagged rocks with a little green clinging around their bases. That was the woods and meadows she had thought so high. They followed paths through the hot fields and were never out of the sound of barking dogs. They met people on the paths.

At first the Franciscan said, "Do not speak to anybody—they will wonder who you are." But he had to answer when greetings were spoken.

"Is this the way to Shkodra? We are going to Shkodra to the Bishop's house. This is my servant with me, who has come from the mountains.

"It is all right, you look like a servant in these clothes," he said to Lottar. "But do not speak—they will wonder, if you speak."

I HAD painted the walls of my bookstore a clear, light yellow. Yellow stands for intellectual curiosity. Somebody must have told me that. I opened the store in March of 1964. This was in Victoria, in British Columbia.

I sat there at the desk, with my offerings spread out behind me. The publishers' representatives had advised me to stock books about dogs and horses, sailing and gardening, bird books and flower books—they said that was all anybody in Victoria would buy. I flew against their advice and brought in novels and poetry and books that explained about Sufism and relativity and Linear B. And I had set out these books, when they came, so that Political Science could shade into Philosophy and Philosophy into Religion without a harsh break, so that compatible poets could nestle together, the arrangement of the shelves of books—I believed—reflecting a more or less natural ambling of the mind, in which treasures new and forgotten might be continually surfacing. I had taken all this care, and now what? Now I waited, and I could have felt like somebody who had got dramatically dressed up for a party, maybe even fetching jewels from the pawnshop or the family vault, only to discover that it was just a few neighbors playing cards. It was just meat loaf and mashed potatoes in the kitchen, and a glass of fuzzy pink wine.

The store was often empty for a couple of hours at a time, and then when somebody did come in, it would be to ask about a book remembered from the Sunday-school library or a grandmother's bookcase or left behind twenty years ago in a foreign hotel. The title was usually forgotten, but the person

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would tell me the story. It is about this little girl who goes out to Australia with her father to mine the gold claims they have inherited. It is about the woman who had a baby all alone in Alaska. It is about a race between one of the old clipper ships and the first steamer, way back in the eighteen-forties.

Oh, well. I just thought I'd ask.

They would leave without a glance at the riches around them.

A few people did exclaim in gratitude, said what a glorious addition to the town. They would browse for half an hour, an hour, before spending seventy-five cents.

It takes time.

I had found a one-room apartment with a kitchenette in an old building at a corner called the Dardanelles. The bed folded up into the wall. But I did not usually bother to fold it up, because I never had any company. And the hook seemed unsafe to me. I was afraid that the bed might leap out of the wall sometime when I was eating my tinned-soup or baked-potato supper. It might kill me. Also, I kept the window open all the time, because I believed I could smell a whiff of escaping gas, even when the two burners and the oven were shut off. With the window open at home and the door open at the store, to entice the customers, it was necessary for me to be always bundled up in my black woolly sweater or my red corduroy dressing gown (a garment that had once left its pink tinge on all my forsaken husband's handkerchiefs and underwear). I had difficulty separating myself from these comforting articles of clothing so that they might be washed. I was sleepy much of the time, underfed and shivering.

But I was not despondent. I had made a desperate change in my life, and in spite of the regrets I suffered every day, I was proud of that. I felt as if I had finally come out into the world in a new, true skin. Sitting at the desk, I made a cup of coffee or of thin red soup last an hour, clasping my hands around the cup while there was still any warmth to be got from it. I read, but without purpose or involvement. I read stray sentences from the books that I had always meant to read. Often these sentences seemed so satisfying to me, or so elusive and lovely, that I could not help abandoning all the surrounding words and giving myself up to a peculiar state. I was alert and

THE WRITER'S TOWN: 1948

THESE cocktail parties were a modus vivendi in themselves for which a new philosophy, a new ethic, and a new etiquette had had to be devised. They were neither work nor play, and yet they were not at all beside the point but were, on the contrary, quite indispensable to the spiritual life of the artists who went to them. It was possible for Emma to see these occasions objectively, after these many months of abstention from them, but it was still not possible to understand them, for they were so special a case, and so unlike any parties she had known at home. The gossip was different, for one thing, because it was stylized, creative (integrating the whole of the garrotted, absent friend), and all its details were precise and all its conceits were Jamesian, and all its practitioners sorrowfully saw themselves in the role of Pontius Pilate, that hero of the untoward circumstance. (It has to be done, though we don't want to do it; 'tis a pity she's a whore, when no one writes more intelligent verse than she.) There was, too, the matter of the drinks which were much worse than those served by anyone else, and much more plentiful. They dispensed with the fripperies of olives in Martinis and cherries in Manhattans (God forbid! They had no sweet teeth), and half the time there was no ice, and when there was, it was as likely as not to be suspect shavings got from a bed for shad at the corner fish store. Other species, so one heard, went off to dinner after cocktail parties certainly no later than half past eight, but no one ever left a party given by an Olympian until ten, at the earliest, and then groups went out together, stalling and squabbling at the door, angrily unable to come to a decision about where to eat, although they seldom ate once they got there but, with the greatest formality imaginable, ordered several rounds of cocktails, as if they had not had a drink in a month of Sundays. But the most surprising thing of all about these parties was that every now and again, in the middle of the urgent, general conversation, this cream of the enlightened was horribly curdled, and an argument would end, quite literally, in a bloody nose or a black eye. Emma was always astounded when this happened and continued to think that these outbursts did not arise out of hatred or jealousy but out of some quite unaccountable quirk, almost a reflex, almost something physical. She never quite believed her eyes—that is, was never altogether convinced that they were really beating one another up. It seemed, rather, that this was only a deliberate and perfectly honest demonstration of what might have happened often if they had not so diligently dedicated themselves to their intellects. Although she had seen them do it, she did not and could not believe that city people clipped each other's jaws, for, to Emma, urban equalled urbane, and ichor ran in these Augustans' veins.

From "Children Are Bored on Sundays,"
by Jean Stafford

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dreamy, closed off from all particular people but conscious all the time of the city itself—which seemed a strange place.

A small city, here at the western edge of the country. Pockets of fakery for tourists. The Tudor shop fronts, and double-decker buses, and flowerpots, and horse-drawn rides: almost insulting. But the sea light in the street, the spare and healthy old people leaning into the wind as they took their daily walks along the broom-topped cliffs, the shabby, slightly bizarre bungalows with their monkey-puzzle trees and ornate shrubs in the gardens. Horse-chestnut trees blossom as spring comes on, hawthorn trees along the streets bear red-and-white flowers, oily-leaved bushes put out lush pink and rose-red blooms such as you would never see in the hinterlands. Like a town in a story, I thought—like the transplanted seaside town of the story set in New Zealand or Tasmania. But something North American persists. So many people, after all, have come here from Manitoba or Saskatchewan. At noon a smell of dinners cooking drifts out of poor, plain apartment buildings. Frying meat, boiling vegetables—farm dinners being cooked, in the middle of the day, in cramped kitchenettes.

How could I tell what I liked so much? Certainly it was not what a new merchant might be looking for—bustle and energy to raise the hope of commercial success. *Not much doing* was the message the town got across to me. And when a person who is opening a store doesn't mind hearing the message *Not much doing* you could ask, What's going on? People open shops in order to sell things, they hope to become busy so that they will have to enlarge the shop, then to sell more things, and grow rich, and eventually not have to come into the shop at all. Isn't that true? But are there other people who open a shop with the hope of being sheltered there, among such things as they most value—the yarn or the teacups or the books—and with the idea only of making a comfortable assertion? They will become a part of the block, a part of the street, part of everybody's map of the town, and eventually of everybody's memories. They will sit and drink coffee in the middle of the morning, they will get out the familiar bits of tinsel at Christmas, they will wash the windows in spring before spreading out the new stock. Shops, to these people, are what a cabin in the woods might be to somebody else—a refuge and a justification.

Some customers are necessary, of course. The rent comes due, and the stock will not pay for itself. I had inherited a little money—that was what had made it possible for me to come out here and get the shop going—but unless business picked up to some extent I could not last beyond the summer. I understood that. I was glad that more people started coming in as the weather warmed up. More books were sold, survival began to seem possible. Book prizes were due to be awarded in the schools at the end of term, and that brought the schoolteachers with their lists and their praise and their unfortunate expectation of discounts. The people who came to browse were buying regularly, and some of them began to turn into friends—or the sort of friends I had here, where it seemed I would be happy to talk to people day after day and never learn their names.

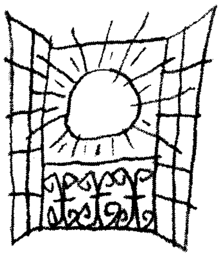
WHEN Lottar and the priest first saw the town of Shkodra, it seemed to float above the mudflats, its domes and steeples shining as if they were made of mist. But when they entered it in the early evening all this tranquillity vanished. The streets were paved with big, rough stones and were full of people and donkey carts, roving dogs, pigs being driven somewhere, and smells of fires and cooking and dung and something terrible—like rotten hides. A man came along with a parrot on his shoulder. The bird seemed to be shrieking curses in an unknown language. Several times the Franciscan stopped people and asked the way to the Bishop's house, but they pushed by him without answering or laughed at him or said some words he didn't understand. A boy said that he would show the way, for money.

"We have no money," the Franciscan said. He pulled Lottar into a doorway and there they sat down to rest. "In Maltsia e madhe," he said, "many of these who think so well of themselves would soon sing a different tune."

Lottar's notion of running away and leaving him had vanished. For one thing, she could not manage to ask directions any better than he could. For another, she felt that they were allies who could not survive in this place out of sight of each other. She had not understood how much she depended on the smell of his skin, the aggrieved determination of his long strides, the flourish of his black mustache.

The Franciscan jumped up and said he had remembered—he had remembered now the way to the Bishop's house. He hurried ahead of her through narrow, high-walled back streets where nothing of houses or courtyards could be seen—just walls and gates. The paving stones were thrust up, so that walking here was as difficult as in the dry riverbed. But he was right, he gave a shout of triumph, they had come to the gate of the Bishop's house.

A servant opened the gate and let them in, but only after some high-pitched argument. Lottar was told to sit on the ground just inside the gate, and the Franciscan was led into the house to see the Bishop. Soon someone was sent through the streets to the British Consulate (Lottar was not told this), and he came back with the Consul's manservant. It was dark by then, and the Consul's servant carried a lantern. And Lottar was led away again. She followed the servant and his lantern to the Consulate.



A tub of hot water for her to bathe in, in the courtyard. Her clothes taken away. Probably burned. Her greasy, black, vermin-infested hair cut off. Kerosene poured on her scalp. She had to tell her story—the story of how she came to Maltsia e madhe—and this was difficult, because she was no longer used to speaking English, also because that time seemed so far away and unimportant. She had to learn again to sleep on a mattress, to sit on a chair, to eat with a knife and fork.

As soon as possible, they put her on a boat.

Charlotte stopped. She said, "That part is not of interest."

I HAD come to Victoria because it was the farthest place I could get to from London, Ontario, without going out of the country. In London, my husband, Donald, and I had rented a basement apartment in our house to a couple named Nelson and Sylvia. Nelson was an English major at the university and Sylvia was a nurse. Donald was a dermatologist, and I was doing a thesis on Mary Shelley—not very quickly. I had met Donald when I went to see him about a rash on my neck. He was eight years older than I was—a tall, freckled, blushing man, cleverer than he looked. A dermatologist sees grief and despair, though the problems that bring people to him may not be in the same class as tumors and blocked arteries. He sees sabotage from within, and truly unlucky fate. He sees how matters like love and happiness can be governed by a patch of riled-up cells. Experience of this sort had made Donald kind, in a cautious, impersonal way. He said that my rash was probably due to stress, and that he could see that I was going to be a wonderful woman, once I got a few problems under control.

We invited Sylvia and Nelson upstairs for dinner, and Sylvia told us about the tiny town they both came from, in northern Ontario. She said that Nelson had always been the smartest person in their class and in their school and possibly in the whole town. When she said this, Nelson looked at her with a perfectly flat and devastating expression, an expression that seemed to be waiting with infinite patience and the mildest curiosity for some explanation, and Sylvia laughed, and said, "Just kidding, of course."

When Sylvia was working late shifts at the hospital, I sometimes asked Nelson to share a meal with us in a more informal way. We got used to his silences and his indifferent table manners and to the fact that he did not eat rice or noodles, eggplant, olives, shrimp, peppers, or avocados, and no doubt a lot of other things, because those had not been familiar foods in the town in northern Ontario.

Nelson looked older than he was. He was short, and sturdily built, sallow-skinned, unsmiling, with a suggestion of mature scorn and handy pugnaciousness laid over his features, so that it seemed he might be a hockey coach, or an intelligent, uneducated, fair-minded, and foulmouthed foreman of a construction gang, rather than a shy, twenty-two-year-old student.

He was not shy in love. I found him resourceful and determined. The seduction was mutual, and it was a first affair for both of us. I had once heard somebody say, at a party, that one of the nice things about marriage was that you could have real affairs—an affair before marriage could always turn out to be nothing but courtship. I was disgusted by this speech, and frightened to think that life could be so bleak and trivial. But once my own affair with Nelson started, I was amazed all the time. There was no bleakness or triviality about it, only ruthlessness and clarity of desire, and sparkling deception.

Nelson was the one who first faced up to things. One afternoon, he turned on his back and said hoarsely and defiantly, "We are going to have to leave."

I thought he meant that he and Sylvia would have to leave, they could not go on living in this house. But he meant himself and me. "We" meant himself and me. Of course he and I had said "we" of our arrangements, of our transgression. Now he had made it the "we" of our decision—perhaps of a life together.

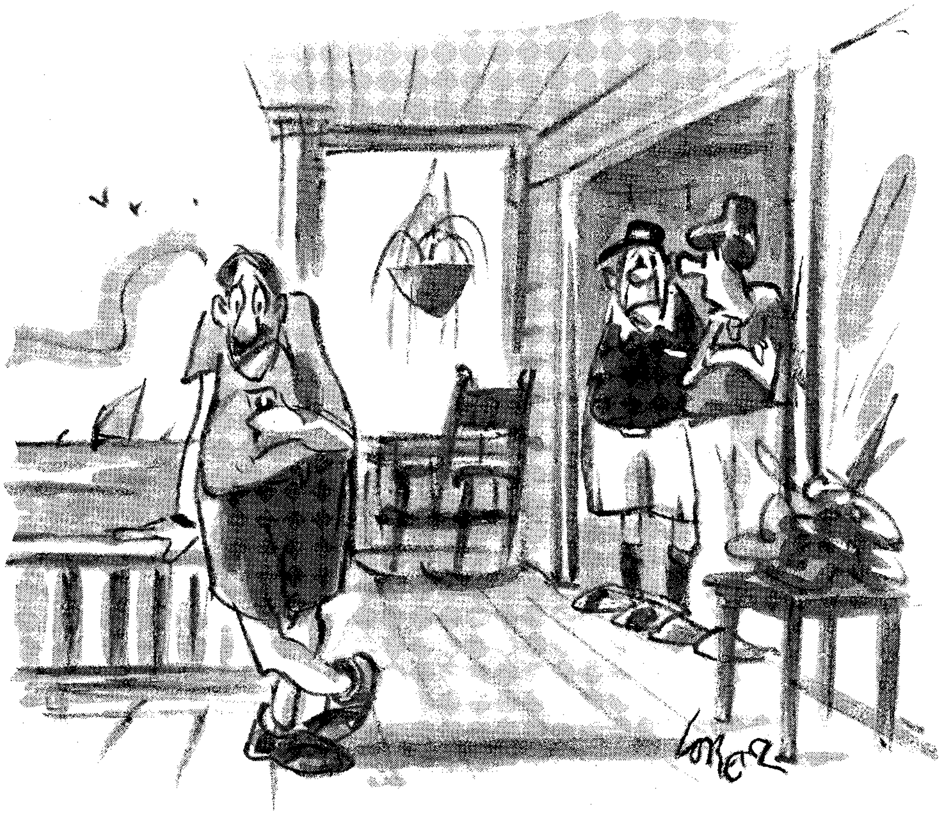
My thesis was supposed to be on Mary Shelley's later novels, the ones nobody knows about. "Lodore," "Perkin Warbeck," "The Last Man." But I was really more interested in Mary's life before she learned her sad lessons and buckled down to raising her son to be a baronet. I loved to read about the other women who had hated or envied or traipsed along: Harriet, Shelley's first wife, and Fanny Imlay, who was Mary's half sister and may have been in love with Shelley herself, and Mary's stepsister, Mary Jane Clairmont, who took my own name—Claire—and joined Mary and Shelley on their unwed honeymoon so that she could keep on chasing Byron. I had often talked to Donald about impetuous Mary and married Shelley and their meetings at Mary's mother's grave, about the suicides of Harriet and Fanny and the persistence of Claire, who had a baby by Byron. But I never mentioned any of this to Nelson, partly because we had little time for talk and partly because I did not want him to think that I drew some sort of comfort or inspiration from this mishmash of love and despair and treachery and self-dramatizing. I did not want to think so myself. And Nelson was not a fan of the nineteenth century or the Romantics. He said so. He said that he wanted to do something on the Muckrakers. Perhaps he meant that as a joke.

Sylvia did not behave like Harriet. Her mind was not influenced or impeded by literature, and when she found out what had been going on, she went into a wholesome rage.

"You blithering idiot," she said to Nelson.

"You two-faced twit," she said to me.

The four of us were in our living room. Donald went on cleaning and filling his pipe, tapped it and lit it, nursed and inspected it, drew on it, lit it again—all so much the way someone would do in a movie that I was embarrassed for him. Then he put some books and the latest copy of *Maclean's* into his briefcase, went to the bathroom to get his razor and to the bedroom to get his pajamas, and walked out.



"Michiko Kakutani called it a good read."

He went straight to the apartment of a young widow who worked as a secretary at his clinic. In a letter he wrote to me later, he said that he had never thought of this woman except as a friend until that night, when it suddenly dawned on him what a pleasure it would be to love a kind and sensible, *unwracked-up* sort of person.

Sylvia had to be at work at eleven o'clock. Nelson usually walked her over to the hospital—they did not have a car. On this night she told him that she would rather be escorted by a skunk.

That left Nelson and me alone together. The scene had lasted a much shorter time than I had expected. Nelson seemed gloomy but relieved, and if I felt that short shrift had been given to the notion of love as a capturing tide, a glorious and harrowing event, I knew better than to show it.

We lay down on the bed to talk about our plans and ended up making love, because that was what we were used to doing. Sometime during the night, Nelson woke up and thought it best to go downstairs to his own bed.

I got up in the dark, dressed, packed a suitcase, wrote a note, and walked to the phone at the corner, where I called a taxi. I took the train to Toronto, connecting with the train to Vancouver. It was cheaper to take the train, if you were willing to sit up for four nights, which I was.

So there I sat, in the sad, shambling morning in the day coach, coming down the steep-walled Fraser Canyon into the sodden Fraser Valley, where smoke hung over the small, dripping houses, the brown vines, the thorny bushes and huddled sheep. It was in December that this earthquake in my life had arrived. Christmas was cancelled for me. Winter with its snowdrifts and icicles and invigorating blizzards was cancelled by this blurred season of muck and rain. I was constipated, I knew that I had bad breath, my limbs were cramped, and my spirits utterly bleak. And did I not think then, What nonsense it is to suppose one man so different from another when all that life really boils down to is getting a decent cup of coffee and room to stretch out in? Did I not think that even if Nelson were sitting here beside me, he would have turned into a gray-faced stranger whose desolation and unease merely extended my own?

No. No. Nelson would still be Nelson to me. I had not changed, with regard to his skin and his smell and his forbidding eyes. It seemed to be the outside of Nelson which came most readily to my mind, and in the case of Donald it was his inner quakes and sympathies, the labored-at kindness and those private misgivings that I had got knowledge of by wheedling and conniving. If I could have my love of these two men together, and settle it on one man, I would be a happy woman. If I could care for everybody in the world as minutely as I did for Nelson, and as calmly, as uncarnally as I now did for Donald, I would be a saint. Instead, I had dealt a twofold, a wanton-seeming, blow.

THE regular customers who had changed into something like friends were: a middle-aged woman who was a chartered accountant but preferred such reading as “Six Existentialist Thinkers,” and “The Meaning of Meaning”; a provincial civil servant who ordered splendid, expensive works of pornography such as I had not known existed (their elaborate Oriental, Etruscan connections seemed to me grotesque and uninteresting, compared with the simple, effective, longed-for rituals of myself and Nelson); a Notary Public who lived behind his office at the foot of Johnson Street (“I live in the slums,” he told me. “Some night I expect a big bruiser of a fellow to lurch around the corner hollering ‘*Ste-el-la*’ ”); and the woman I knew later as Charlotte—the Notary Public called her the Duchess. None of these people cared much for one another, and an early attempt that I made to bring the accountant and the Notary Public into conversation was a fizzle.

“Spare me the females with the withered, painted faces,” the Notary Public said, the next time he came in. “I hope you haven’t got her lurking around anywhere tonight.”

“A writer?” she gasped, her perky breasts heaving. “God, I love writers!”

It was true that the accountant painted her thin, intelligent, fifty-year-old face with a heavy hand, and drew on eyebrows that were like two strokes of India ink. But who was the Notary Public to talk, with his stumpy, nicotined teeth and pocked cheeks?

“I got the impression of a rather superficial fellow,” the accountant said, as if she had guessed and bravely discounted the remarks made about herself.

So much for trying to corral people into couples, I wrote to Donald. *And who am I to try?* I wrote to Donald regularly, describing the store, and the city, and even, as well as I could, my own unaccountable feelings. He was living with Helen, the secretary. I wrote also to Nelson, who might or might not be living alone, might or might not be reunited with Sylvia. I didn’t think he was. I thought she would believe in inexcusable behavior and definite endings. He had a new address. I had looked it up in the London phone book at the public library. Donald, after a grudging start, was writing back. He wrote impersonal, mildly interesting letters about people we both knew, events at the clinic. Nelson did not write at all. I started sending registered letters. Now I knew, at least, that he picked them up.

Charlotte and Gjurdhi must have come into the store together, but I did not understand that they were a couple until it was time for them to leave. Charlotte was a heavy, shapeless, but quick-moving woman, with a pink face, bright-blue eyes, and a lot of glistening white hair, worn like a girl’s, waving down over her shoulders. Though the weather was fairly warm, she was wearing a cape of dark-gray velvet with a scanty gray-fur trim—a garment that looked as if it belonged, or had once belonged, on the stage. A loose shirt and a pair of plaid wool slacks showed underneath, and there were open sandals on her broad, bare, dusty feet. She clanked as if she wore hidden armor. An arm reaching up to get a book showed what caused the clanking. Bracelets—any number of them, heavy or slender, tarnished or bright. Some were set with large, square stones, the color of toffee or blood.

“Imagine this old fraud being still on the go,” she said to me, as if continuing some desultory and enjoyable conversation.

She had picked up a book by Anaïs Nin.

“Don’t pay any attention,” she said. “I say terrible things. I’m quite fond of the woman, really. It’s him I can’t stand.”

“Henry Miller?” I said, beginning to follow this.

“That’s right.” She went on talking about Henry Miller, Paris, California, in a scoffing, energetic, half-affectionate way. She seemed to have been neighbors, at least, with the people she was talking about. Finally, naïvely, I asked her if this was the case.

"No, no. I just feel I know them all. Not personally. Well—personally. Yes, personally. What other way is there to know them? I mean, I haven't met them, face-to-face. But in their books? Surely that's what they intend? I know them. I know them to the point where they bore me. Just like anybody you know. Don't you find that?"

She drifted over to the table where I had laid out the New Directions paperbacks.

"Here's the new bunch, then," she said. "Oh, my." She widened her eyes at the photographs of Creeley and Corso and Ferlinghetti. She began reading, so attentively that I thought the next thing she said must be part of some poem.

"I've gone by and I've seen you here," she said. She put the book down and I realized she meant me. "I've seen you sitting in here, and I've thought a young woman would probably like to be outside some of the time. In the sun. I don't suppose you'd consider hiring me to sit there, so you could get out?"

"Well, I would like to—" I said.

"I'm not so dumb. I'm fairly knowledgeable, really. Ask me who wrote Ovid's Metamorphoses. It's all right, you don't have to laugh."

"I would like to, but I really can't afford to."

"Oh, well. You're probably right. I'm not very chic. And I would probably foul things up. I would argue with people if they were buying books I thought were dreadful." She did not seem disappointed. She picked up a copy of "The Dud Avocado" and said, "There! I have to buy this, for the title."

She gave a little whistle, and the man it seemed to be meant for looked up from the table of books he had been staring at, near the back of the store. I had known he was there but had not connected him with her. I thought he was just one of those men who wander in off the street, alone, and stand looking about, as if trying to figure out what sort of place this is or what the books are for. Not a drunk or a panhandler, and certainly not anybody to be worried about—just one of a number of shabby, utterly uncommunicative old men who belong to the city somewhat as the pigeons do, moving restlessly all day within a limited area, never looking at people's faces. He was wearing a coat that came down to his ankles, made of some shiny, rubberized, liver-colored material, and a brown velvet cap with a tassel. The sort of cap a doddery old scholar or a clergyman might wear in an English movie. There was, then, a similarity between them—they were both wearing things that might have been discards from a costume box. But close up he looked years older than she. A long, yellowish face, drooping tobacco-brown eyes, an unsavory, straggling mustache. Some faint remains of handsomeness, or potency. A quenched ferocity. He came at her whistle—which seemed half serious, half a joke—and stood by, mute and self-respecting as a dog or a donkey, while the woman prepared to pay.

At that time, the government of British Columbia applied a sales tax to books. In this case it was four cents.

"I can't pay that," she said. "A tax on books. I think it is immoral. I would rather go to jail. Don't you agree?"

I agreed. I did not point out—as I would have done with anybody else—that the store would not be let off the hook on that account.

"Don't I sound appalling?" she said. "See what this government can do to people? It makes them into *orators.*"

She put the book in her bag without paying the four cents, and never paid the tax on any future occasion.

I described the two of them to the Notary Public. He knew at once who I meant.

"I call them the Duchess and the Algerian," he said. "I don't know what the background is. I think maybe he's a retired terrorist. They go around the town with a wagon, like scavengers."

I GOT a note asking me to supper on a Sunday evening. It was signed *Charlotte,* without a surname, but the wording and handwriting were quite formal.

My husband Gjurdhi and I would be delighted—

Up until then I had not wished for any invitations of this sort and would have been embarrassed and disturbed to get one. So the pleasure I felt surprised me. Charlotte held out a decided promise; she was unlike the others whom I wanted to see only in the store.

The building where they lived was on Pandora Avenue. It was covered with mustard stucco and had a tiny, tiled vestibule that reminded me of a public toilet. It did not smell, though, and the apartment was not really dirty, just horrendously untidy. Books were stacked against the walls, and pieces of patterned cloth were hung up droopily to hide the wallpaper. There were bamboo blinds on the window, sheets of colored paper—surely flammable—pinned over the light bulbs.

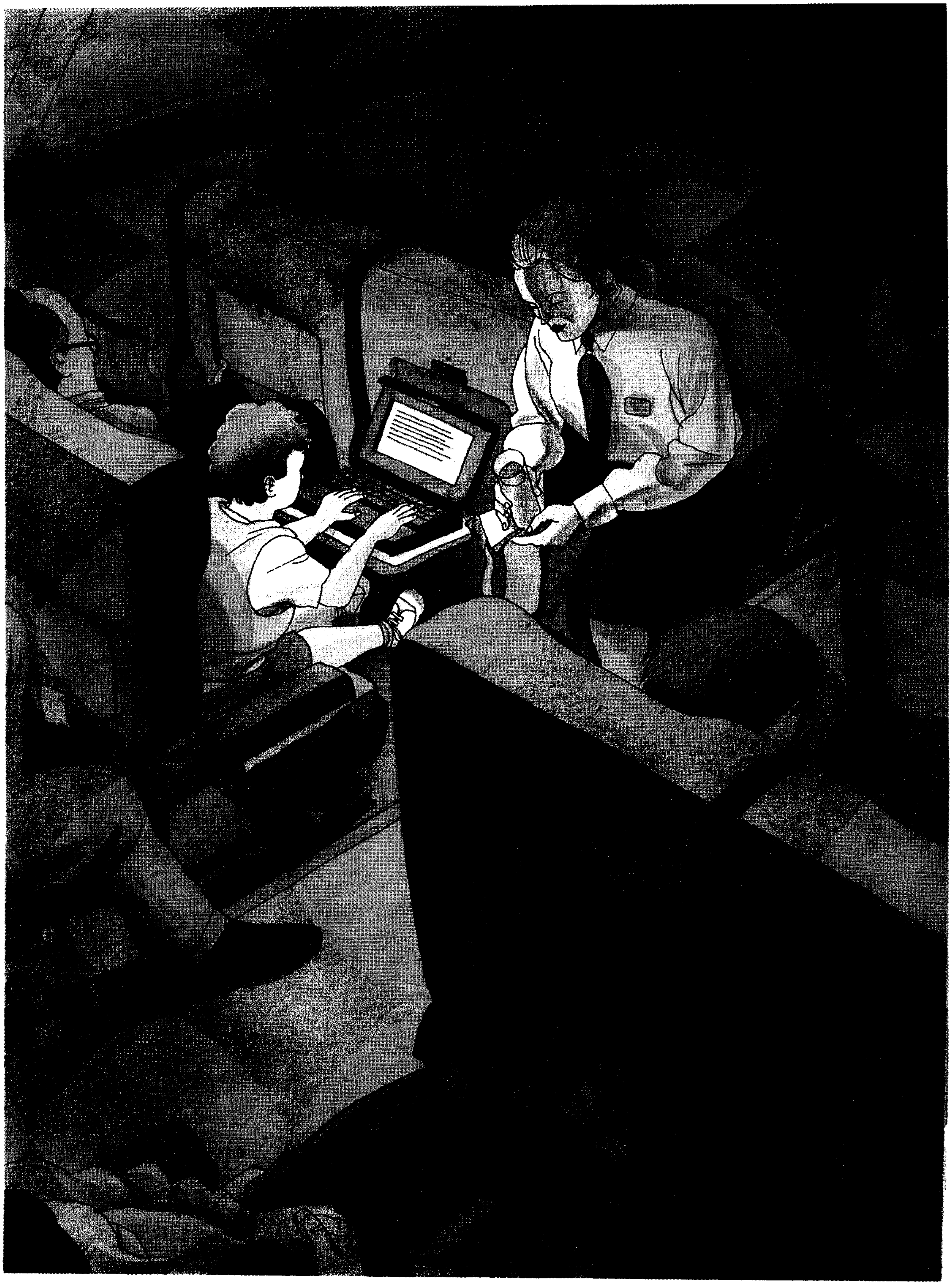
"What a darling you are to come," cried Charlotte. "We were afraid you would have tons more interesting things to do than visiting ancient old us. Where can you sit down? What about here?" She took a pile of magazines off a wicker chair. "Is that comfortable? It makes such interesting noises, wicker. Sometimes I'll be sitting here alone, and that chair will start creaking and cracking exactly as if someone were shifting around in it. I could say it was a presence, but I'm no good at believing in that rubbish. I've tried."

Gjurdhi poured out a sweet yellow wine. For me a long-stemmed glass that had not been dusted, for Charlotte a glass tumbler, for himself a plastic cup. It seemed impossible that any dinner could come out of the little kitchen alcove, where foodstuffs and pots and dishes were piled helter-skelter, but there was a good smell of roasting chicken, and in a little while Gjurdhi brought out the first course—platters of sliced cucumber, dishes of yogurt. I sat in the wicker chair and Charlotte in the single armchair. Gjurdhi sat on the floor. Charlotte was wearing her slacks, and a rose-colored T-shirt which clung to her unsupported breasts. She had painted her toenails to match the T-shirt. Her bracelets clanked against the plate as she picked up the slices of cucumber. (We were eating with our fingers.) Gjurdhi wore his cap and a dark-red silky dressing gown over his trousers. Stains had mingled with its pattern.

After the cucumber, we ate chicken cooked with raisins in golden spices, and sourdough bread, and rice. Charlotte and I were provided with forks, but Gjurdhi scooped the rice up with the bread. I would often think of this meal in the years that followed, when this kind of food, this informal way of sitting

ARTIST'S SKETCHBOOK · BY JORGE COLOMBO

THE ATTENDANT MUSE



" 'Thirty Days in a Single Scull.' Day 17: The early-October nights have grown chilly, and media attention has fallen short of expectations."

• •

and eating, and even some version of the style and the untidiness of the room, would become familiar and fashionable. The people I knew, and I myself, would give up—for a while—on dining-room tables, matching wineglasses, to some extent on cutlery or chairs. When I was being entertained, or making a stab at entertaining people, in this way, I would think of Charlotte and Gjurdhi and the edge of true privation, the risky authenticity that marked them off from all these later imitations. At the time, it was all new to me, and I was both uneasy and delighted. I hoped to be worthy of such exoticism but not to be tried too far.

Mary Shelley came to light shortly. I recited the titles of the later novels, and Charlotte said dreamily, "Per-kin Warbeck. Wasn't he the one—wasn't he the one who pretended to be a little prince who was murdered in the Tower?"

She was the only person I had ever met—not a historian, not a *Tudor* historian—who had known this.

"That would make a movie," she said. "Don't you think? The question I always think about pretenders like that is who do *they* think they are? Do they believe it's true, or what? But Mary Shelley's own life is the movie, isn't it? I wonder there hasn't been one made. Who would play Mary, do you think? No. No, first of all, start with Harriet. Who would play Harriet?

"Someone who would look well drowned," she said, ripping off a golden chunk of chicken. "Elizabeth Taylor? Not a big enough part. Susannah York?

"Who was the father?" she wondered, referring to Harriet's unborn baby. "I don't think it was Shelley. I've never thought so. Do you?"

This was all very well, very enjoyable, but I had hoped we would get to explanations—personal revelations, if not exactly confidences. You did expect some of that, on occasions like this. Hadn't Sylvia, at my own table, told about the town in northern Ontario and about Nelson's being the smartest person in the school? I was surprised at how eager I found myself, at last, to tell my story. Donald and Nelson—I was looking forward to telling the truth, or some of it, in all its wounding complexity, to a person who would not be surprised or outraged by it. I would have liked to puzzle over my behavior, in good company. Had I taken on Donald as a father figure—or as a parent figure, since both my parents were dead? Had I deserted him because I was angry at *them* for deserting *me*? What did Nelson's silence mean, and was it now permanent? (But I did not think, after all, that I would tell anybody about the letter that had been returned to me last week, marked "Not Known at This Address.")

This was not what Charlotte had in mind. There was no opportunity, no exchange. After the chicken, the wineglass and tumbler and cup were taken away and filled with an extremely sweet pink sherbet that was easier to drink than to eat with a spoon. Then came small cups of desperately strong coffee. Gjurdhi lit two candles as the room grew darker, and I was given one of these to carry to the bathroom, which turned out to be a toilet with a shower. Charlotte said the lights were not working.

"Some repairs going on," she said. "Or else they have taken a whim. I really think they take whims. But fortunately we have our gas stove. As long as we have a gas stove we can laugh at their whims. My only regret is that we cannot play any music. I was going to play some old political songs—'I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,' " she sang in a mocking baritone. "Do you know that one?"

I did know it. Donald used to sing it when he was a little drunk. Usually the people who sang "Joe Hill" had certain vague but discernible political sympathies, but with Charlotte I did not think this would be so. She would not operate from sympathies, from principles. She would be playful about what other people took seriously. I was not certain what I felt about her. It was not simple liking or respect. It was more like a wish to move in her element, unsurprised. To be buoyant, self-mocking, gently malicious, unquenchable.

Gjurdhi, meanwhile, was showing me some of the books. How had this started? Probably from a comment I made—how many of them there were, something of that sort—when I stumbled over some on my way back from the toilet. He was bringing forward books with bindings of leather or imitation leather—how could I know the difference?—with marbled endpapers, watercolor frontispieces, steel engravings. At first, I believed admiration might be all that was required, and I admired everything. But close to my ear I heard the mention of money—was that the first distinct thing I had ever heard Gjurdhi say?

"I only handle new books," I said. "These are marvellous, but I don't really know anything about them. It's a completely different business, books like these."

Gjurdhi shook his head as if I had not understood and he would now try, firmly, to explain again. He repeated the price in a more insistent voice. Did he think I was trying to haggle with him? Or perhaps he was telling me what he had paid for the book? We might be having a speculative conversation about the price it might be sold for—not about whether I should buy it.

I kept saying no, and yes, trying to juggle these responses appropriately. *No*, I cannot take them for my store. *Yes*, they are very fine. *No*, truly, I'm sorry, I am not the one to judge.

"If we had been living in another country, Gjurdhi and I might have done something," Charlotte was saying. "Or even if the movies in this country had ever got off the ground. That's what I would love to have done. Got work in the movies. As extras. Or maybe we are not bland enough types to be extras, maybe they would have found bit parts for us. I believe extras have to be the sort that don't stand out in a crowd, so you can use them over and over again. Gjurdhi and I are more memorable than that. Gjurdhi in particular—you could *use* that face."

She paid no attention to the second conversation that had developed, but continued talking to me, shaking her head indulgently at Gjurdhi now and then, to suggest that he was behaving in a way she found engaging, though perhaps importunate. I had to talk to him softly, sideways, nodding all the while in response to her.

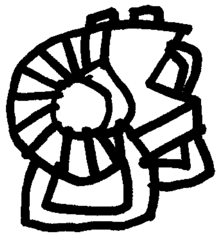
"Really you should take them to the Haunted Bookshop," I said. "Yes, they are quite beautiful. Books like these are out of my range."

Gjurdhi did not whine, his manner was not ingratiating. Peremptory, rather. It seemed as if he would give me orders, and would be most disgusted if I did not capitulate. In my confusion, I helped myself to more of the yellow wine, pouring it into my unwashed sherbet glass. This was probably a dire offense. Gjurdhi looked horridly displeased.

"Can you imagine illustrations in modern novels?" said Charlotte, finally consenting to tie the two conversations together. "For instance, in Norman Mailer? They would have to be abstracts. Don't you think? Sort of barbed wire and blotches?"

I went home with a headache and a feeling of jangled inadequacy. I was a prude, that was all, when it came to mixing up buying and selling with hospitality. I had perhaps behaved clumsily, I had disappointed them. And they had disappointed me. Making me wonder why I had been asked.

I was homesick for Donald, because of "Joe Hill."



I also had a longing for Nelson, because of an expression on Charlotte's face as I was leaving. A savoring and contented look that I knew had to do with Gjurdhi, though I hardly wanted to believe that. It made me think that after I walked downstairs and left the building and went into the street, some hot and skinny, slithery, yellowish, indecent old beast, some mangy but urgent old tiger, was going to pounce among the books and the dirty dishes and conduct a familiar rampage.

A day or so later I got a letter from Donald. He wanted a divorce, so that he could marry Helen.

I HIRED a clerk, a college girl, to come in for a couple of hours in the afternoon, so I could get to the bank, and do some office work. The first time Charlotte saw her she went up to the desk and patted a stack of books sitting there, ready for quick sale.

"Is this what the office managers are telling their minions to buy?" she said. The girl smiled cautiously and didn't answer.

Charlotte was right. It was a book called "Psycho-Cybernetics," about having a positive self-image.

"You were smart to hire her instead of me," Charlotte said. "She is much niftier-looking, and she won't shoot her mouth off and scare the customers away. She won't have *opinions.*"

"There's something I ought to tell you about that woman," the clerk said, after Charlotte left.

T*HAT part is not of interest.*

"What do you mean?" I said. But my mind had been wandering, that third afternoon in the hospital. Just at the last part of Charlotte's story I had thought of a special-order book that hadn't come in, on Mediterranean cruises. Also, I had been thinking about the Notary Public, who had been beaten about the head the night before, in his office on Johnson Street. He was not dead but he might be blinded. Robbery? Or an act of revenge, outrage, connected with a layer of his life that I hadn't guessed at?

"Of course it is of interest," I said. "All of it. It's a fascinating story."

"Fascinating," repeated Charlotte in a mincing way. She made a face, so she looked like a baby vomiting out a spoonful of pap. Her eyes, still fixed on me, seemed to be losing color, losing their childish, bright, and self-important blue. Fretfulness was changing into disgust. An expression of vicious disgust, she showed, of unspeakable weariness—such as people might show to the mirror but hardly ever to one another. Perhaps because of the thoughts that were already in my head, it occurred to me that Charlotte might die. She might die at any moment. At this moment. Now.

She motioned at the water glass, with

its crooked plastic straw. I held the glass so that she could drink, and supported her head. I could feel the heat of her scalp, a throbbing at the base of her skull. She drank thirstily, and the terrible look left her face.

She said, "Stale."

"I *think* it would make an excellent movie," I said fearfully, easing her back onto the pillows. She grabbed my wrist, then let it go.

"Where did you get the idea?" I said.

"From life," said Charlotte indistinctly. "Wait a moment." She turned her head away, on the pillow, as if she had to arrange something in private. Then she recovered, and she told a little more.

CHARLOTTE did not die. At least, she did not die in the hospital. When I came in rather late, the next afternoon, her bed was empty and freshly made up. The nurse who had talked to me before was trying to take the temperature of the woman tied in the chair. She laughed at the look on my face.

"Oh, no!" she said. "Not that. She checked out of here this morning. Her husband came and got her. We were transferring her to a long-term place out in Saanich, and he was supposed to be taking her there. He said he had the taxi outside. Then we get this phone call that they never showed up! They were in great spirits when they left. He brought her a pile of money, and she was throwing it up in the air. I don't know—maybe it was only dollar bills. But we haven't a clue where they've got to."

I walked around to the apartment building on Pandora Avenue. I thought they might simply have gone home. They might have lost the instructions about how to get to the nursing home and not wanted to ask. They might have decided to stay together in their apartment no matter what. They might have turned on the gas.

At first I could not find the building and thought that I must be in the wrong block. But I remembered the corner store and some of the houses. The building had been changed—that was what had happened. The stucco had been painted pink; large, new windows and French doors had been put in; little balconies with wrought-iron railings had been attached. The fancy balconies had been painted white, the whole place had the air of an ice-cream parlor. No doubt it had been renovated inside as well, and the rents increased, so that people like Charlotte and Gjurdhi could have no hope of living there. I checked the names by the door, and of course theirs were gone. They must have moved out some time ago.

The change in the apartment building seemed to have some message for me. It was about vanishing. I knew that Charlotte and Gjurdhi had not actually vanished—they were somewhere, living or dead. But for me they had vanished. And because of this fact—not really because of any loss of them—I was tipped into dismay, more menacing than any of the little eddies of regret that had caught me in the past year. I had lost my bearings. I had to get back to the store so my clerk could go home, but I felt as if I could as easily walk another way, just any way at all. My connection was in danger—that was all. Sometimes our connection is frayed, it is in danger, it seems almost lost. Views and streets deny knowledge of us, the air grows thin. Wouldn't we rather have a destiny to submit to, then, something that claims us, anything, instead of such flimsy choices, arbitrary days?

As I entered the store, I was aware of a man standing near the door, half looking in the window, half looking up the street, then looking at me. He was a short man dressed in a trenchcoat and a fedora. I had the impression of someone disguised. Jokingly disguised. He moved toward me and bumped my shoulder, and I cried out as if I had received the shock of my life, and, indeed, it was true that I had. For this was Nelson, come to claim me. Or at least to accost me, and see what would happen.

OF course Nelson did not like the idea of working in the store, serving the public. He got a job teaching at a boys' school, a posh place where his look of lower-class toughness, his bruising manners, made him an immediate favorite.

We moved from the apartment at the Dardanelles to a roomy bungalow a few blocks from the sea. We married.

But this was the beginning of a period of estrangement. I became pregnant. Nelson fell in love with the mother of a student. I fell in love with an interne I met at the hospital during labor.

We got over all this—Nelson and I did. We had another child. We acquired friends, furniture, rituals. We went to too many parties at certain seasons of the year, and talked regularly about starting a new life, somewhere far away, where we didn't know anybody.

We became distant, close—distant, close—over and over again.

We have been very happy.

I have often felt completely alone.

There is always in this life something to discover.

The days and the years have gone by in some sort of blur.

On the whole, I am satisfied.

WHEN Lottar was leaving the Bishop's courtyard, she was wrapped in a long cloak they had given her, perhaps to conceal her ragged clothing, or to contain her smell. The Consul's servant spoke to her in English, telling her where they were going. She could understand him but could not reply. It was not quite dark. She could still see the pale shapes of roses and oranges in the Bishop's garden.

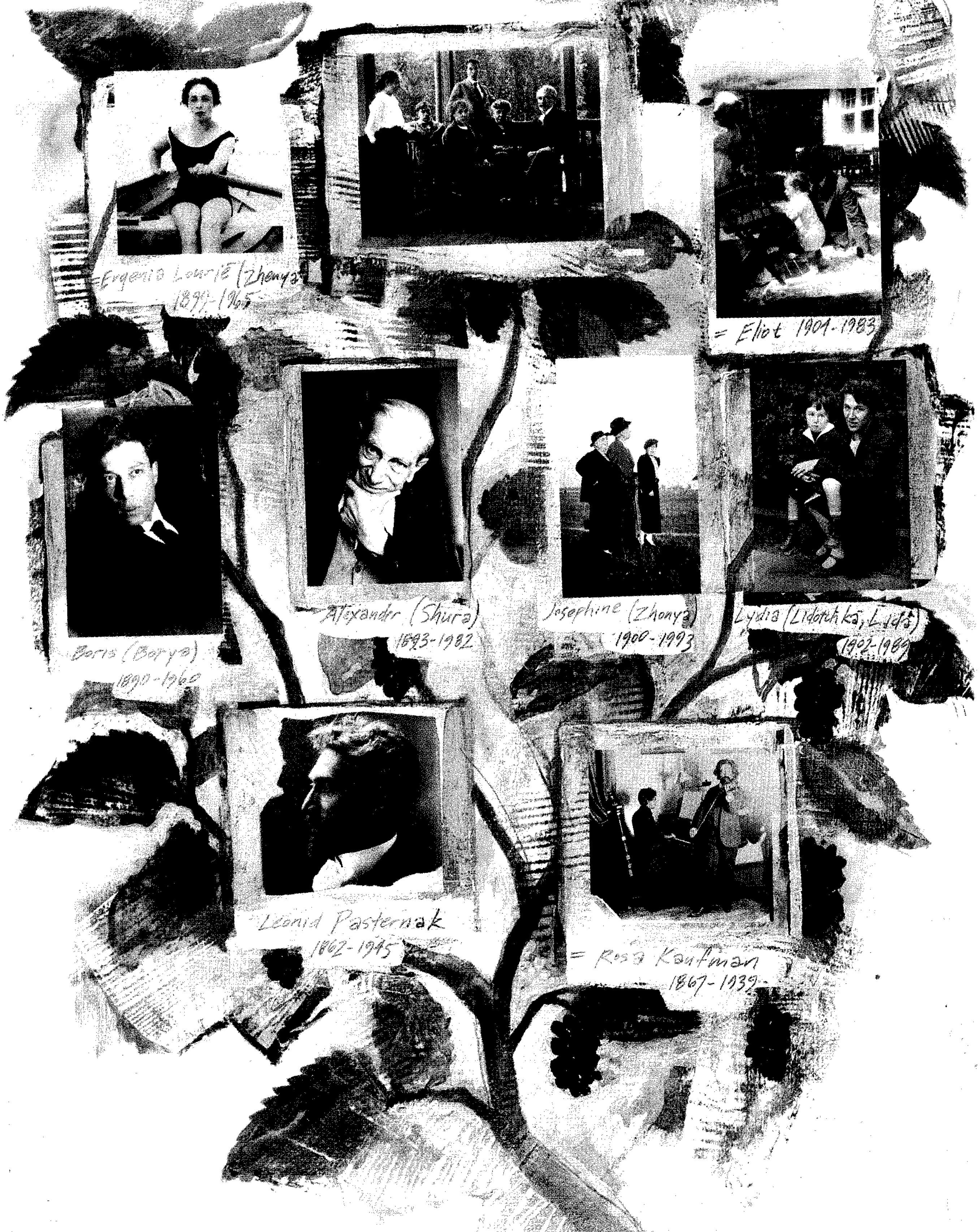
The Bishop's man was holding the gate open.

She had never seen the Bishop at all. And she had not seen the Franciscan since he had followed the Bishop's man into the house. She called out for him now, as she was leaving. She had no name to call, so she called, "*Xoti! Xoti! Xoti!*" which means "lord" or "master" in the language of the Ghegs. But no answer came, and the Consul's servant swung his lantern impatiently, showing her the way to go. Its light fell by accident on the Franciscan who was standing half concealed by a tree. It was a little orange tree he stood behind. His face, pale as the oranges were in that light, looked out of the branches, all its swarthiness drained away. It was a wan face, hanging in the tree, its melancholy expression quite impersonal and undemanding, like the expression you might see on the face of a devout but proud apostle in a church window. Then it was gone, taking the breath out of her body, as she knew too late.

SHE called him and called him, and when the boat came into the harbor at Trieste he was waiting on the dock. ♦

HISTORY: THE HOME MOVIE

BY CRAIG RAINE


=Evgenia Lourié (Zhenya)
1899-1965
= Eliot 1901-1983
Boris (Borya)
1890-1960
Alexander (Shura)
1893-1982
Josephine (Zhonya)
1900-1993
Lydia (Lidochka, Lida)
1902-1989
Leonid Pasternak
1862-1945
= Rosa Kaufman
1867-1939

Following are excerpts from the author's novel in verse: an exploration and a reimagining of the eventually intersecting fates of two families in Russia and England—the Pasternaks and the Raines—beginning at the turn of the century and continuing through the Russian Revolution and the Second World War. Additional episodes will appear in subsequent weeks.

1915: THE QUEEN'S OWN OXFORDSHIRE HUSSARS

A tackroom in the trenches,
its earthen walls
whitewashed like a Camembert.

On his letter form he writes:
Serg. 197394 Henry Raine.
My dearest Queenie,

Your news about our little Alice
came as a bit of a "blow."
Just like that. Diptheoria.

It makes you think.
Try not to brood about her.
I have a helmet for the boys

not a scuttle mind or what
they call a pickle howb,
its a shako. Well they'll see.

Half the regiment
is to be transferred
from A.T. to a Cycle Corps,

but nothing certain yet.
It would have been her birthday
week after next. I miss you. H.

He turns the shako in his big hands,
solid as a leather motorcar.
Mudguards back and front,

a radiator badge, spare wheels
holding the chin strap double
like a bumper on the peak.

Bags of room in the boot
where it bulges to clasp
the curve of the head.

A present from CENSORED.
Its beauty censored itself
by the field cover of gray.

Twenty U.P. saddles 1912
are gathered in a corner
scenting like a beagle pack,

and a Hotchkiss machine gun
stares out through the slit,
propped on its elbows.

Shoecases, mess tins, bridles,
leather boots for short Lee-Enfields,
fetlock gaiters, portmouth bits,

webbing, pickets, Webley bullets
blunt as crayon stubs,
water bottles deaf with felt:

his language, this tongue,
this stable way of life,
will be lost in translation,

just as the battle becomes
a pair of scissors on a map.
Instead of a chestnut

kiss-kissing up crumbs
on the palm of his hand,
a bicycle with solid tires.

So much on his mind.
I miss you means that sometimes
he is stirred by the pleat

at the back of a British warm:
they call it the Chinese chink
or Widow Twankie's twat.

Silk underwear survives
in the feel of hoarfrost
on a blade of grass:

a *melting reluctance*
that stiffens and stirs
and buckles with blood.

As he comes with closed eyes,
he calls to mind
Instruction for Recruits:

if she'll do it, she's got it,
so when you're missing your missus,
take the wanking spanner out, lad.

Disgust. He tucks away
the tang of bloater paste.
Mucous membrane of a worm.

And now there's work to do.
The horses' respirators
are improvised imperfectly:

nose bags crackling with hay
like Christmas stockings,
waiting to be watered.

It is better than nothing,
but only just. The mustard
burns the eyes as well,

carving out chancres,
and works on the hooves
like spit in sherbet.

With two misshapen canvas buckets,
he makes for the water wagon
two trenches away

as a bombardment begins:
old Bill's Jack Johnsons
and a chorus of minnies.

DiphtheeeeeeeeeriA.
Under everything he hears
the voice of his daughter:

Dad, I can read in my head.
I don't say it out loud.
It's lovely. Watch.

I move my eyes on the words.
That's all that happens.
I think-read the words.

She would have been eight
the week after next. Alice.
DiphtheeeeeeeeeriA.

He risks a look,
a look at no man's land.
A rusty can is raising

its hat. The khaki dead
in Phenate-Hexane masks
are fixed, like horseflies

feeding on filth
with a black proboscis
and bulging perspex eyes.

Spilling his water,
he tacks to the tackroom,
rebandages his left puttee

and paints the horses khaki
for the dawn patrol.
A mummy with embalming blanko.

1921: NEP AND NARKOMINDEL

His toupee was an open book
but his pallid hands
were guarded on the desk.

They gave nothing away,
not the tiniest gesture,
while his wet lips came and went,

explaining to Lydia
that there were no exit visas
for the family of Pasternak.

There is nothing he can do
and, as if to illustrate,
he takes his right hand

in his left, and shifts it slowly,
like a pointer, heavy, stiff,
to a brass bell by the in-tray.

He tings it carefully,
leaving his hand on the nipple
and curve of the brass.

Before the clerk arrives:
"Germany, you said? Parents and sister?
Yes. Your legs are very beautiful."

She has been observing his legs.
The desk is without a modesty board.
A caliper clamped to his boot

like the steel stirrup
of a bike's front brake.
Surprised, she looks up.

Has she heard what she heard?
The official shows her
the gap left by a canine.

"Our train is leaving tomorrow.
We must have the visas.
I was told they were ready."

The beige folder is on the desk,
unopened, left by the clerk.
Again, the missing eyetooth.

"As you can see for yourself,
there is no record of your application."
A pause prolongs itself

until, almost primly,
"I must ask you to leave.
People are queuing outside."

Shocked, she cannot speak.
Will she be able to walk
on her beautiful legs,

out through this ordinary door
and back into Russia for good?
Never to be abroad again?

Hammer and sickle. Forever.
Gilt on red. Cloisonné. Blurred
emblem of the ampersand.

She might be the North Star,
Sarah Bernhardt herself,
making an entrance:

everyone waiting watches the door,
as if the door were God,
as if the door were a loaded gun.

Descending the five flights
of gray stone stairs,
she is stopped by a shout:

it is an old man, breathless,
with trembling sticky brown lips,
who wants her to look at his papers.

"You have a kind face.
They won't look at my papers.
Wrong stamp. Should be a circle.

Not this what's-it triangle.
They gave me the wrong one.
See. So now I don't exist."

She cannot face his eyes
as he stands there in tears.
He is too old. He trembles too much.

She hands him her handkerchief
and then runs away
down the rest of the stairs.

At home on the Volkhonka,
they are roping the trunks
with their brass epaulettes.

"I will ask Lunacharsky.
Shush. God is good."
And Leonid unhooks the telephone,

hung in the hall,
an earwig of brass and Bakelite.
"There has been a mistake."

So, next morning the visas arrive,
stabbed all over with stamps,
smashed and smeared like flies.

1924: LENIN TAKES A LONG BATH

A what? A curio, a question,
floating in the formalin
like a dried apricot,

stoned, preserved in syrup,
with five singed hairs,
part of a compote

slowly coming to life.
Cold, Shura gathers his cloak,
its falling, elegant line

broken, bunched up
by his invisible fists,
like a bat in the sling of itself.

Pepa Zbarsky, chemical engineer,
an apron beard over his apron,
observes his colleague,

the mausoleum architect,
from across the lab and smiles:
"Give up? Pudenda. Really.

And this thing here's a prick."
Black as a truffle,
cross section of cinder.

They turn again to Lenin,
tanning the color of biltong,
deep in his bath of marinade:

fresh oak bark, in solution,
plus lanolin, glycerin,
cod-liver oil, in equal parts.

The vascular system
still flooded with formaldehyde,
his expression is fixed:

pledges of cotton wool
fill out the eyelids,
twine keeps the jaw shut

like a system of pulleys,
in and out, nostril and septum,
up and down, behind the lips.

"I'll make a sop of him,"
Zbarsky says, in English,
ducking the head

which bobs like a ballcock:
"Shakespeare. 'Richard the Third.'
Not bad for a chemist.

He'll soon be permanent.
Old ways work best. Evisceration.
Those Pharaohs knew about meat.

Keep your aneurysm needles,
your English Swann-Morton handles
for the shape-Z blades. Dyes?

Who needs eosin or safranine?"
Zbarsky comically simpers,
pursing his mouth to the corpse.

"In less than a month,
he'll be hard as bloody Bakelite,
with amyl acetate to stop the moths."

Shura gathers his cloak
in both hands, holding it closed,
closed as a curtain on stage,

While Zbarsky encores in English:
"Here's fine revolution,
an we had the trick to see't."

Shura would like to whistle a tune
as proof that Lenin is dead,
but his lips have been sealed. ♦

FICTION

RIDING THE RAP

BY ELMORE LEONARD

OCALA Police picked up Dale Crowe Junior, two o'clock in the morning, for weaving, crossing the center line, and having a busted tail-light. Then while Dale was blowing a point-one-nine they put his name and date of birth into the national crime computer and learned he was a fugitive felon, wanted on a three-year-old charge of Unlawful Flight to Avoid Incarceration. A few days later Raylan Givens, with the Marshals Service, came up from Palm Beach County to take Dale back, and the Ocala Police wondered about Raylan.

How come if he was a federal officer and Dale Crowe Junior was wanted on a state charge . . . He told them he was with FAST, the Fugitive Apprehension Strike Team, assigned to the Sheriff's Office in West Palm. And that was pretty much all this marshal said. They wondered, too, since he was alone, how he'd be able to drive and keep an eye on his prisoner. Dale Crowe Junior had been convicted of a third-degree five-year felony, Battery of a Police Officer, and was looking at additional time on the fugitive warrant. Dale Junior might feel he had nothing to lose on this trip south. He was a rangy kid with the build of a college athlete, bigger than this marshal in his blue suit and cowboy boots—the marshal calm, though, not appearing to be the least apprehensive. He said the West Palm strike team was shorthanded at the moment, the reason he was alone, but he believed he would manage.

And when he put his hat on and drove off with Dale Junior in the confiscated two-year-old Cadillac he was using, a dark-blue one, an Ocala officer said, "He believes he'll manage. . . ."

Another officer said, "Don't you know who that is? He's the one the Mafia guy drew on last winter in Miami Beach—the two of them sitting at the same table, and this marshal shot him dead. Yeah, Raylan Givens. It was in the paper."

"That why he didn't give us the time of day? I doubt he said five words. Shows us his star . . ."

The one who had read about Raylan Givens said, "I didn't get that impression. I saw him as all business, the kind goes by the book."

HE said to Dale Crowe Junior, "I know you think you can drive when you've had a few. How good are you when you're sober?"

This marshal not sounding like the usual hard-ass lawman; Dale Junior was glad of that. He said, "I had a Caddy myself one time, till I sold it for parts and went to work at Disney's. You know what I tried out for? Play Goofy. Mickey Mouse's friend? Only you had to water-ski, and I couldn't get the hang of it. Sir, I like to mention that these three years since I took off? I been clean. I never even left the state of Florida all that time, not wanting to be too far away from my folks, my old mom and dad, except I never did get to see them."

The marshal, Raylan Givens, said, "If you're gonna talk I'll put you in the trunk and I'll drive."

So neither of them said another word until they were south of Orlando on the Turnpike, a hundred and sixty miles to West Palm, Dale Junior staring straight ahead at the highway, flat and straight through Florida scrub, boring, holding it right around sixty so as to make the trip last, give him time to think of a move he might try on the marshal. The man didn't appear to be much to handle, had a slim build and looked like a farmer—sounded like one, too—forty years old or so; he sat against his door, seat belt fastened, turned somewhat this way. He had on one of those business cowboy hats, but broken in; it looked good on him, the way he wore it cocked over one eye.

Dale Junior would feel him staring, though when he glanced over, the marshal was usually looking out at the road or the countryside, patient, taking the ride as it came. Dale Junior decided to start feeling him out.

"Can I say something?"

The marshal was looking at him now.

"What's that?"

"There's a service plaza coming up. I wouldn't mind stopping, get something to eat?"

The man shook his head and Dale Junior made a face, giving the marshal an expression of pain.

"I couldn't eat that jail food they give you. Some kind of potatoes and imitation eggs cold as ice." He waited as long as he could, almost a minute, and said, "I don't see why we can't talk some. Pass the time."

The marshal said, "I don't care to hear any sad stories, all the bad luck and bum deals life's handed you."

Dale Junior showed him a frown. "Don't it mean anything I got nothing on my sheet the past three years, that I've been clean all that time?"

The marshal said, "Not to me it doesn't. Son, you're none of my business."

Dale Junior shook his head, giving himself a beat look now, without hope. He said, "I'll tell you, I thought more'n once of giving myself up. You know why?"

The marshal waited, not helping any.

"So I could see my folks. So I'd know they was O.K. I didn't dare write, knowing the mails would be watched." When the marshal didn't comment, Dale Junior said, "They do that, don't they?"

"What?"

"Watch the mails?"

"I doubt it."

Dale Junior said, "Oh, well," paused and said, "My old dad lost one of his legs, had it bit off by a alligator this time he's fishing the rim canal, by Lake Okeechobee? I sure wish I could see him before we get to Gun Club. That's where we're going, huh—the Gun Club jail?"

"You're going to the county lockup," the marshal said, "to await a sentence hearing."

"Yeah, well, that's what they call it, account of it's off Gun Club Road. So you're not from around there, huh—West Palm?"

The marshal didn't answer, seeming more interested in the sky, clouds coming in from way out over the ocean.

"Where you from, anyway?"

"I live down in Miami."

"I been there once or twice. Man, all the spics, huh? My dad's never been to Palm Beach or seen the ocean. Never got any closer'n Twenty Mile Bend. You believe it? Spent his whole life over there around Belle Glade, Canal Point, Pahokee. . . ." He waited, eyes on the road, before saying, "You know, if we was to get off near Stuart we could take 76 over to the lake, run on down to Belle Glade—it wouldn't be more'n a few miles out of the way and I'd get to see my folks. I mean just stop and say hi, kiss my old mom . . ." Dale Junior turned to look at the marshal. "What would you say to that?" He waited and said, "Not much, huh?"

"Your old dad's never been to Palm Beach or seen the ocean," the marshal said, "but he's been up to Starke, hasn't he? He's seen the Florida State Prison. You have an uncle came out of there, Elvin Crowe, and another one did his time at Lake Butler. I think we'll skip visiting any of your kin this trip."

Dale Junior said, "My uncles're both dead."

And the marshal said, "By gunshot, huh? You understand how I see your people?"

Now he said, "You can speed it up some."

Dale Junior looked over at him. "You want me to break the law?"

Raylan didn't answer, staring at the open vista of flat land to the east, what he imagined the plains of Africa might be like.

"We could use some gas."

"We'll make it," Raylan said.

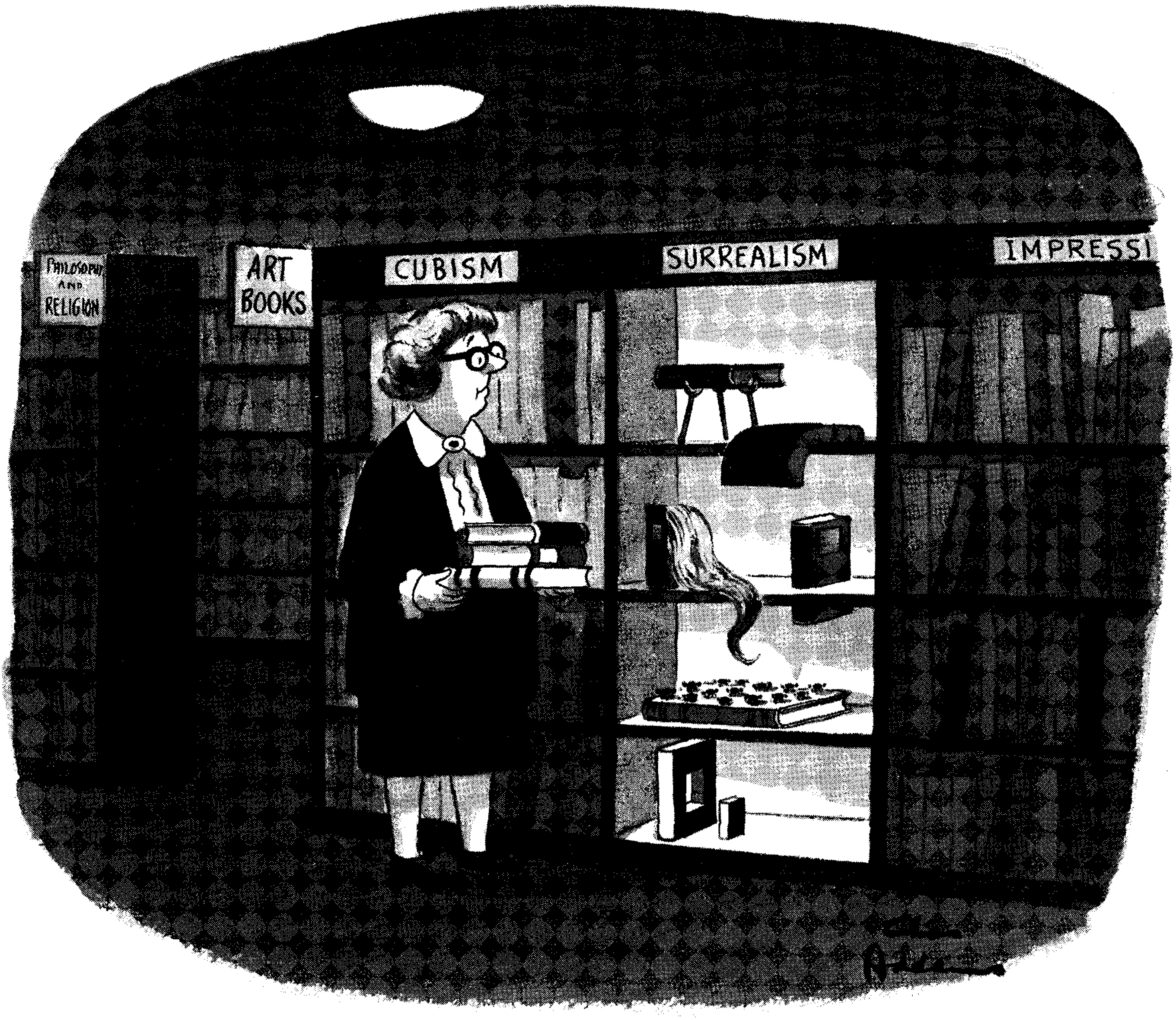
"Fort Drum Service Plaza's coming up."

Raylan didn't say anything to that.

"Aren't you hungry?"

This time Raylan said, "I'll see you get something at the jail."

"I ain't had a regular meal," Dale Junior said, "since the day I was arrested,



THE WRITER'S TOWN: 1966

THE balloon, beginning at a point on Fourteenth Street, the exact location of which I cannot reveal, expanded northward all one night, while people were sleeping, until it reached the Park. There, I stopped it. At dawn the northernmost edges lay over the Plaza; the free-hanging motion was frivolous and gentle. But experiencing a faint irritation at stopping, even to protect the trees, and seeing no reason the balloon should not be allowed to expand upward, over the parts of the city it was already covering, into the "air space" to be found there, I asked the engineers to see to it. This expansion took place throughout the morning, a soft imperceptible sighing of gas through the valves. The balloon then covered forty-five blocks north-south and an irregular area east-west, as many as six crosstown blocks on either side of the Avenue in some places. That was the situation, then.

But it is wrong to speak of "situations," implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution, some escape of tension; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there—muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with walnut and soft yellows. A deliberate lack of finish, enhanced by skillful installation, gave the surface a rough, forgotten quality; sliding weights on the inside, carefully adjusted, anchored the great, vari-shaped mass at a number of points. Now we have had a flood of original ideas in all media, works of singular beauty as well as significant milestones in the history of inflation, but at that moment there was only *this balloon*, concrete particular, hanging there.

From "The Balloon," by Donald Barthelme

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and you know what it was? A hamburger and fries, some onion rings. That night for supper I had potato chips. See, all day I was out looking for work. I *had* a job, working for a paint contractor? Scraped down and sanded this entire goddam two-story house and the guy lets me go. That's what they do, they use you. My trade, I drove a big goddam cane truck from the fields to the sugar house—back before I had that trouble and had to take off. Now, the way the system works, what's known as the free-enterprise system? They're free to use you on some dirt job nobody wants, and when you get done they fire you. Four dollars an hour, man—that's the system, as good as it gets."

Raylan watched him as he spoke, Dale Junior staring straight ahead, rigid, arms extended, hands gripping the top arc of the steering wheel. Big hands with bony white knuckles. Raylan turned a little more in the seat-belt harness to face him and raised his left leg a few inches to rest it against the edge of the seat. He could feel his service pistol, a Beretta 9, holstered to his right hip, wedged in there against the door. Handcuffs were hooked to his belt. A shotgun, an MP5 machine gun, his vest, a sledgehammer, and several more pairs of cuffs were in the trunk. He had left the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office about nine this morning. Almost five hours up to Ocala, then had to wait around an hour for the paperwork before getting his prisoner. By then it was after three. Now, more than halfway back, it was starting to get dark.

"The night I got stopped," Dale Junior said, "I had like four beers and the potato chips while I shot some pool, that's all. O.K., driving home, this place where I been staying with a friend, I'm minding my own fucking business, not doing anything wrong, I get pulled over. Listen to this. On account of one of my tail-lights ain't working. The cops get me out of the car, tell me to walk the line, touch my fucking nose, they give me all this shit and take me in for the breath test. O.K., I want to know who says it's fair. I'm clean three years, been working on and off when I could find a job, and now I'm gonna get sent up to F.S.P.?" Dale Junior said. "Do five years, maybe even more'n that on account of a busted *tail*-light?"

Raylan got ready.

Dale Junior said, "Bull *shit!*" Turned his head and strained against his seat belt as he swung at Raylan backhand to club him with his fist, and Raylan brought his leg up under the arm coming at him and punched the heel of his cowboy boot hard into Dale Junior's face. The car swerved left, hit the grassy median, and swerved back into the double lanes, Dale Junior hunched over the wheel holding on. By this time Raylan was out of his seat belt, had his Beretta in his right hand, and was holding it in Dale Junior's face, waiting for him to look over.

When he did, Raylan said, "Pull off the road." He waited until they were parked on the shoulder before reaching around to get his handcuffs. He said to Dale Junior, "Here, put one on your left wrist and snap the other one to the wheel."

Dale Junior, blood leaking from his nose, stunned but still irate, in Raylan's judgment, said, "I can't drive handcuffed to the steering wheel."

Raylan held up his free hand for Dale Junior to look at and began rubbing the tips of his thumb and index finger together. He said, "You know what this is? It's the world's smallest violin. A fella did that in a movie where these six scudders wearing black suits go and rob a jewelry store and they all get killed. You see it? It was a good one."

THEY drove on toward West Palm with darkness spreading over the land, Dale Junior getting used to the handcuffs, looking over as the marshal said, "Put your lights on." Saying then, "Everybody's got problems, huh? Different kinds for different people. Account of you think you're tough you're going up to State Prison where you'll have to prove it."

Dale Junior said, "You gonna report what I did, get me another couple of years up there?" and had to wait.

The marshal taking a few moments

before he said, "Last month I went to Brunswick, Georgia, to visit my sons. One's ten, the other's four and a half, living up there with their mom and a real-estate man she married name of Gary, has a little cookie-duster mustache. Winona calls the boys punkins, always has. But this Gary calls them punks. I told him not to do it, my sons aren't punks. He says it's short for 'punkin,' that's all. I told him, 'I don't care for it, O.K.? So don't call them that.' If I'd known about you then I could've told Gary your story and said, 'That's what a punk is, a person refuses to grow up.' "

"I asked you," Dale Junior said, "if you're gonna bring me up on a charge."

"You hear your tone of voice?" the marshal said, sitting over there in the dark. "I'm not your problem."

It was quiet in the car following the headlights along the Turnpike, neither of them saying another word until they came to the toll booth and the marshal paid the man and they got off on Okeechobee Boulevard in West Palm. The marshal told him to go east to Military Trail and turn right, and Dale Junior told him he knew the way to Gun Club, O.K.?

Now there were street lights and signs and stores lit up, back in civilization.

"Your problem," the marshal said, "you can't accept anyone telling you what to do."

Dale Junior only grunted, feeling another sermon coming.

The marshal saying now, "If you can't live with it, don't ever get into law enforcement."

"If I can't live with what?"

"Being told what to do, having superiors."

Dale Junior said, "Oh," slowing down and braking for a yellow light turning red, thinking, Jesus, what he always wanted to do, get into law enforcement.

It was as they coasted to the intersection and stopped they got rammed from behind.

RAYLAN felt himself pressed against the seat harness, his head snapping back and forward again. He heard Dale Junior say "God *damn!*" and saw him gripping the wheel, looking up at the rearview mirror now. Raylan got his seat belt undone before looking around to see the headlights of a pickup truck close behind the Cadillac's rear deck. Now it was backing up a few feet, the driver making sure the bumpers weren't locked together.

"Goddam jig," Dale Junior said.

Two of them, young black guys, coming from the pickup now as Raylan got out and walked back toward them: the one on the driver's side wearing a crocheted skullcap, the other one, his hair done in cornrows, holding something in his right hand Raylan took to be a pistol, holding it against his leg, away from a few cars going past just then—all the traffic Raylan could see coming for the next few blocks. They were by a vacant lot; stores across the street appeared closed except for a McDonald's.

The pickup truck's bumper, higher than the Cadillac's, had plowed into the sheet metal, smashing the tail-lights on the left side and popping the trunk, the lid creased and raised a few inches.

Raylan recognized the revolver the guy held, a .357 mag with a six-inch barrel; he had one at home just like it, Smith & Wesson. Raylan kept his mouth shut, not wanting to say something that might get these guys upset. This was a car-jacking, the guys were no doubt wired, and that .357 could go off for no reason. Raylan looked at the damaged trunk again, studying it to be occupied.

The one with cornrows and the gun against his leg said, "You see what I got here?"

Raylan looked him in the eye for the first time and nodded.

The one in the crocheted skullcap walked up to the driver's side of the Cadillac. The one with cornrows said to Raylan, "We gonna trade, let you have a pickup truck for this here. You see a problem with that?"

Raylan shook his head.

The one in the crocheted skullcap glanced back this way as he said, "Come here, look at this."

The moment the one with the cornrows turned and moved away Raylan raised the trunk lid. He brought out his Remington 12-gauge, then had to wait for a car to pass before stepping away from the trunk. Raylan put the shotgun on the two guys looking at Dale Junior handcuffed to the steering wheel and did something every lawman knew guaranteed attention and respect. He racked the pump on the shotgun, back and forward, and that hard metallic sound, better than blowing a whistle, brought the two guys around to see they were out of business.

"Let go of the pistol," Raylan said. "Being dumb don't mean you want to get shot."

He used two pairs of cuffs from the trunk to link the car-jackers together—had them do it left wrist to left wrist and right wrist to right wrist—side by side and had them slide into the front seat next to Dale Junior.

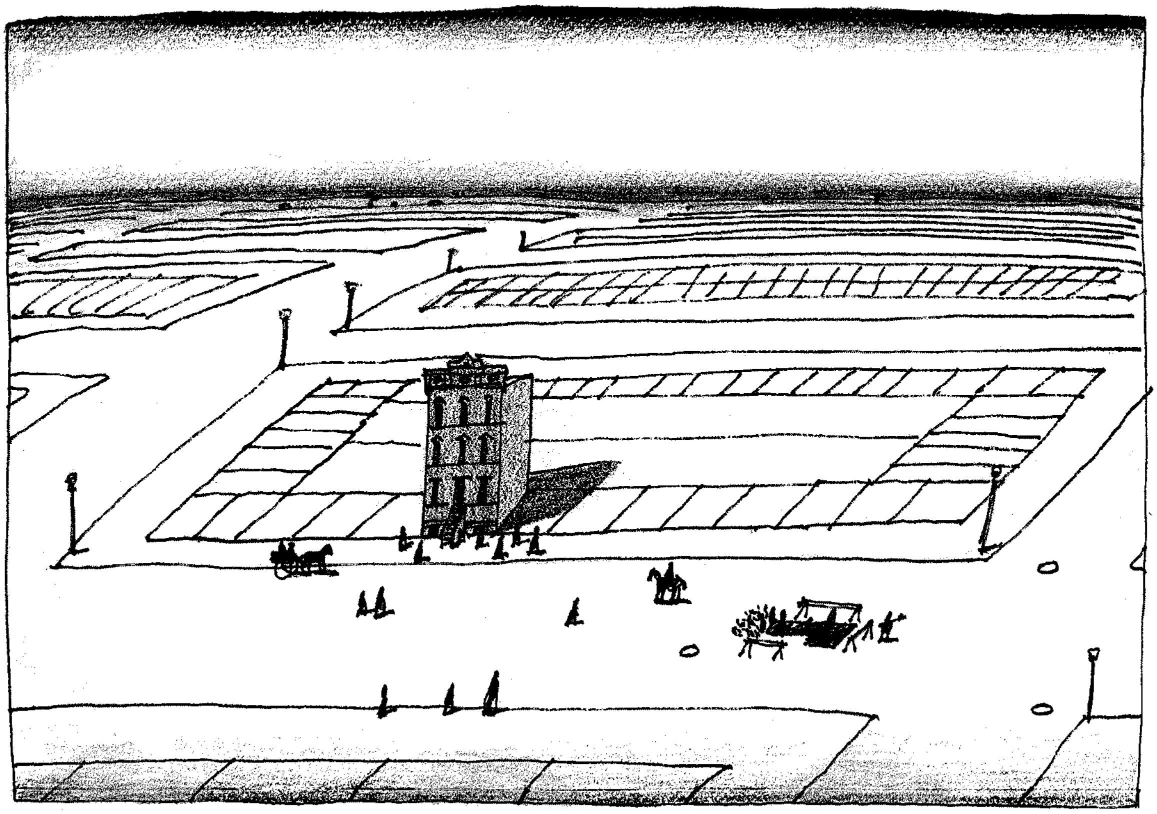
WOULD he have shot them? Dale Junior kept quiet wondering about it. One of the cops back in Ocala had told him he'd better behave while in this marshal's care, but he hadn't thought about it until now. He could feel the shoulder of the car-jacker sitting next to him, the one with cornrows, pressing against his arm. Now the marshal, back there in the dark with his shotgun, was saying, "Fellas, this is Dale Crowe Junior, another one believes it's the system's fault he's ill-tempered and feels it's O.K. to assault people."

Saying then, after a minute, "I know a fella sixty-seven years old, got rich off our economic system running a sports book, has more money'n he can ever spend. But this man, with all his advantages, doesn't know what to do with himself. Mopes around, drinks too much, gets everybody upset and worried so they'll feel sorry for him."

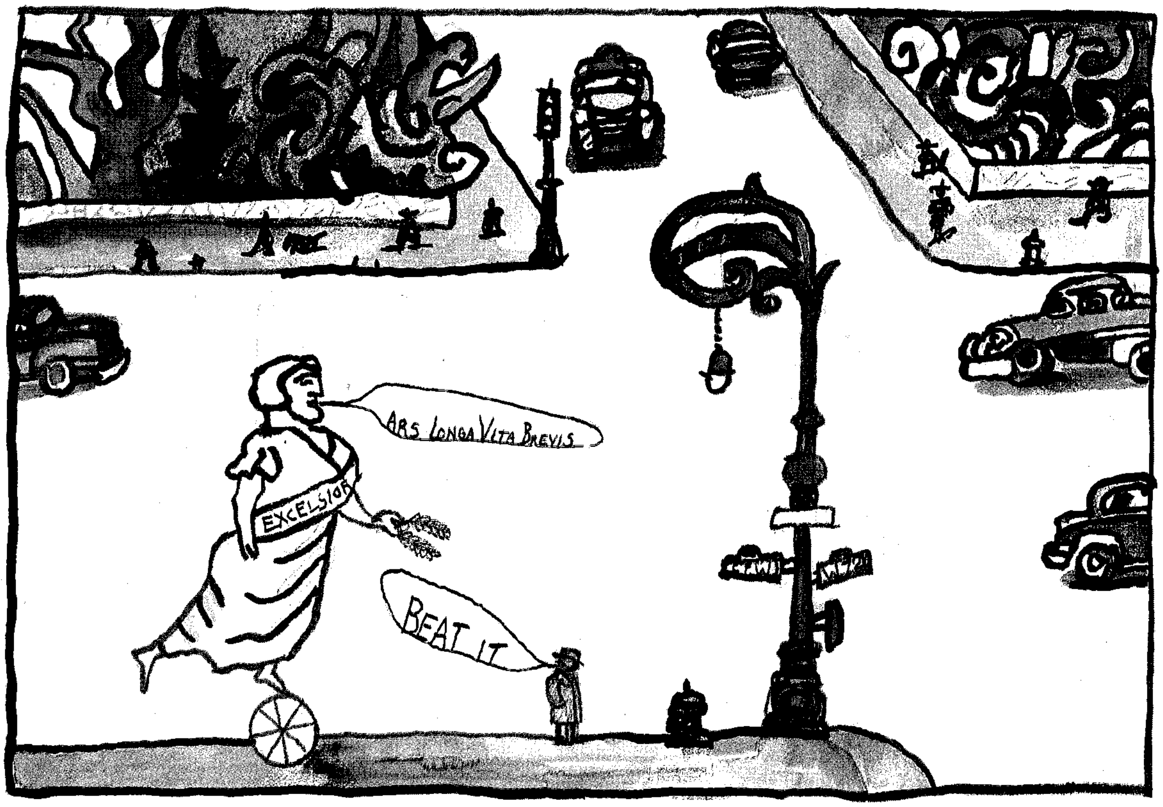
The car-jacker next to Dale Junior said, "You was to lemme go, I'll see the man don't bother you no more."

Dale Junior thought the marshal would tell him to keep his mouth shut, maybe poke him with the shotgun. But nothing happened like that, and there was a silence, no sound from back there in the dark until the marshal said, "You miss the point. This friend of mine isn't bothering me any, he's his own problem. Same as you fellas. I don't take what you did personally. You understand? Want to lean on you. Or wish you any more state time'n you deserve. What you'll have to do now is ride the rap, as they say. It's all anybody has to do." ◆

MANHATTAN



The first brownstone in Manhattan, c. 1840.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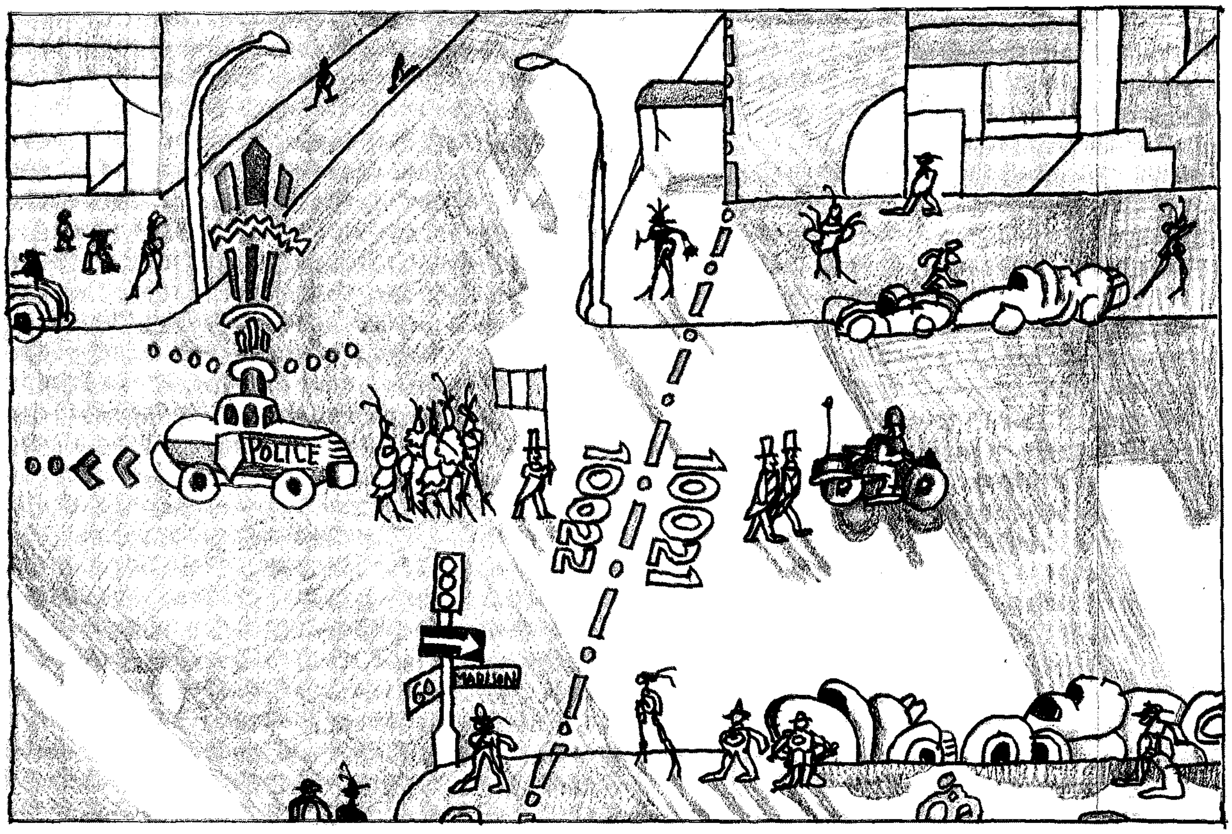
Fame accosts Faulkner outside the Dakota, December, 1952.

BY SAUL STEINBERG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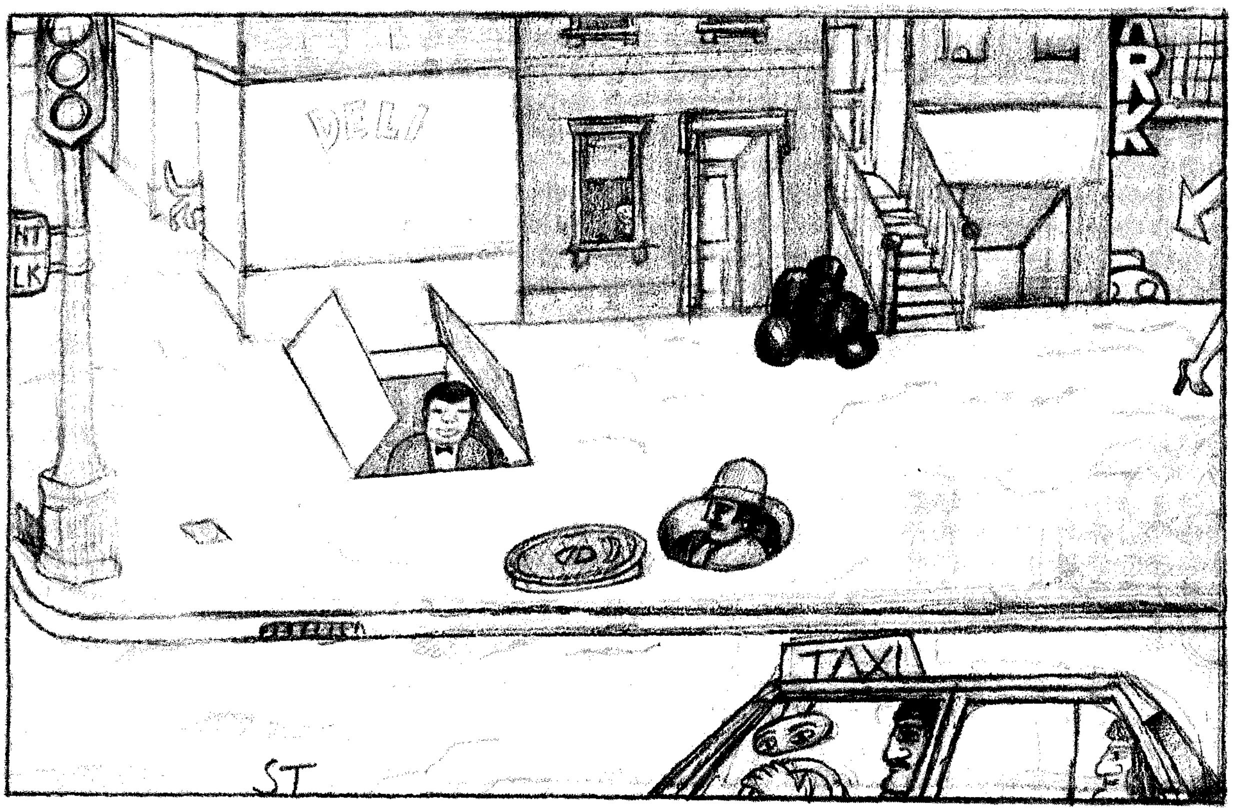
A delegation from the Fourteenth Arrondissement visits the 10021 Zip Code, October, 1978.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Fragments of people on Second Avenue, August, 1992.

FICTION

WIDOWS

BY WILLIAM TREVOR

WAKING on a warm, bright morning in early October, Catherine found herself a widow. In some moment during the night Matthew had gone peacefully: had there been pain or distress she would have known it. Yet what lay beside her in the bed was less than a photograph now, the fallen jaw harshly distorting a face she'd loved.

Tears ran on Catherine's cheeks and dripped onto her nightdress. She knelt by the bedside, then drew the sheet over the still features. Quiet, gently spoken, given to thought before offering an opinion, her husband had been regarded by Catherine as cleverer and wiser than she was herself, and more charitable in his view of other people. In his business life—the sale of agricultural machinery—he had been known as a man of his word. For miles around, far beyond the town and its immediate neighborhood, the farm people who had been his customers repaid his honesty and straight dealing with respect. At Christmas there had been gifts of fowls and fish, jars of cream, sacks of potatoes. The funeral would be well attended. "There'll be a comfort in the memories, Catherine," Matthew had said more than once, attempting to anticipate the melancholy of their separation; they had known that it was soon to be.

He would have held the memories to him if he'd been the one remaining. "Whichever is left," he reminded Catherine as they grew old, "it's only for the time being." And in that time being one or other of them would manage in what had previously been the other's domain: he working the washing machine, ironing his sheets and trousers, cooking as he had watched her cook, using the Electrolux; she arranging for someone to undertake the small repairs he had attended to in the house if she or her sister couldn't manage them, paying the household bills and keeping an eye on the bank balance. Matthew had never minded talking about their separation, and had taught her not to mind either.

On her knees by the bedside Catherine prayed, then her tears came again. She reached out for his hand and grasped the cold, stiff fingers beneath the bedclothes. "Oh, love," she whispered. "Oh, love."

THE three sons of the marriage came for the funeral, remaining briefly, with their families, in the town where they had spent their childhood. Father Cahill intoned the last words in the cemetery, and soon after that Catherine and her sister Alicia were alone in the house again. Alicia had lived there since her own husband's death, nine years ago; she was the older of the two sisters—fifty-seven, almost fifty-eight.

The house that for Catherine was still haunted by her husband's recent presence was comfortable, with a narrow hall and a kitchen at the back, and bedrooms on two floors. Outside, it was color-washed blue, with white window frames and hall door—the last house of the town, the first on the Dublin road. Opposite was the convent school, behind silver-painted railings, three sides enclosed by the drab concrete of its classrooms and the nuns' house, its play yard often bustling into noisy excitement. Once upon a time Catherine and Alicia had played there themselves, hardly noticing the house across the road, blue then also.

"You're all right?" Alicia said on the evening of the funeral, when together they cleared up the glasses sherry had been drunk from, and cups and saucers. On the sideboard in the dining room the stoppers of the decanters had not yet been replaced, crumbs not yet brushed from the dining-table cloth.

"Yes, I'm all right," Catherine said. In her girlhood she had been pretty—slender and dark, and shyly smiling, dimples in both cheeks. Alicia, taller, dark also, had been considered the beauty of the town. Now Catherine was graying, and plump about the face, the joints of her fingers a little swollen. Alicia was straight-backed, her beauty still recalled in features that were classically proportioned, her hair grayer than her sister's.

"Good of them all to come," Catherine said.

"People liked Matthew."

"Yes."

For a moment Catherine felt the rising of her tears, the first time since the morning of the death, but stoically she held them in. Their marriage had not gone. Their marriage was still there in children and in grandchildren, in the voices that had spoken well of it, in the bed they had shared, and in remembering. The time being would not be endless; he had said that, too. "You're managing, Catherine?" people asked, the same words often used, and she tried to convey to them that strength still came from all there had been.

THE day after the funeral Fagan from the solicitors' office explained to Catherine the contents of the few papers he brought to the house. It took ten minutes.

"I'll help you," Alicia said later that same morning when Catherine mentioned Matthew's personal belongings. Clothes and shoes would be accepted gratefully by one of the charities with which Alicia was connected. The signe ring, the watch, the tiepin, the matching fountain pen and propelling penci were earmarked for the family, to be shared among Catherine's sons. Shaving things were thrown away.

Recalling the same sorting out o possessions at the time of her own loss Alicia was in no way distressed. She had experienced little emotion when he husband's death occurred: for the las nineteen years of her marriage she had not loved him.

"You've been a strength," Catherine said, for her sister had been that and more, looking after her as she used to, years ago, when they were children.

"Oh, no, no," came Alicia's deprecation.

THOMAS PIUS JOHN LEARY was by trade a painter and decorator. He had, for this work, no special qualifications beyond experience; he brought to it no special skill. As a result, he was often accused of poor workmanship, which in turn led to disputes about payment. But he charged less than his competitors and so insured a reasonably steady demand for his services. When for one reason or another the demand wasn't there he took on any kind of odd job he was offered.

Leary was middle-aged now, married, the father of six children. He was a small, wiry man with tight features and bloodshot eyes, his spareness occasionally reminding people of a hedgerow animal they could not readily name. Sparse gray hair was brushed straight back from the narrow dome of his forehead. Two forefingers, thumbs, middle fingers, upper lip, and teeth were stained brown from cigarettes he manufactured with the aid of a small machine. Leary did not wear overalls when at work and was rarely encountered in clothes that did not bear splashes of paint.

It was in this condition, the damp end of a cigarette emerging from a cupped palm, that he presented himself to Catherine and Alicia one afternoon in November, six weeks after the death. He stood on the doorstep, declaring his regrets and his sympathy in a low voice, not meeting Catherine's eye. In the time that had passed, other people had come to the door and said much the same thing; not many, only those who found it difficult to write a letter and considered the use of the telephone to be inappropriate in such circumstances. They'd made a brief statement and then had hurried off. Leary appeared inclined to linger.

"That's very good of you, Mr. Leary," Catherine said.

A few months earlier he had repainted the front of the house, the same pale blue. He had renewed the white gloss of the window frames. "Poor Leary's desperate for work," Matthew had said. "Will we give the rogue a go?" Alicia had been against it, Leary not being a man she'd cared for when he'd done other jobs for them. Catherine, although she didn't much care for Leary either, felt sorry for anyone who was up against it.

"Could I step in for a minute?"

Across the street the convent children were running about in the play yard before their afternoon classes began. Still watching them, Catherine was aware of checking a frown that had begun to gather. He was looking for more work, she supposed, but there was no question of that. Alicia's misgivings had been justified; there'd been skimping on the amount and quality of the paint used, and inadequate preparation. "We'll know not to do that again," Matthew had said. Besides, there wasn't anything else that required attention at present.

"Of course." Catherine stood aside while Leary passed into the long, narrow hall. She led the way down it, to the kitchen because it was warm there. Alicia was polishing the cutlery at the table, a task she undertook once a month.

"Sit down, Mr. Leary," Catherine invited, pulling a chair out for him.

"I was saying I was sorry," he said to Alicia. "If there's any way I can assist at all, any little job, I'm always there."

"It's kind of you, Mr. Leary," Catherine said swiftly, in case her sister responded more tartly.

"I knew him since we were lads. He used be at the Christian Brothers'."

"Yes."

"Great old days."

He seemed embarrassed. He wanted to say something but was having difficulty. One hand went into a pocket of his jacket. Catherine watched it playing with the little contrivance he used for rolling his cigarettes. But the hand came out empty. Nervously, it was rubbed against its partner.

"It's awkward," Leary said.

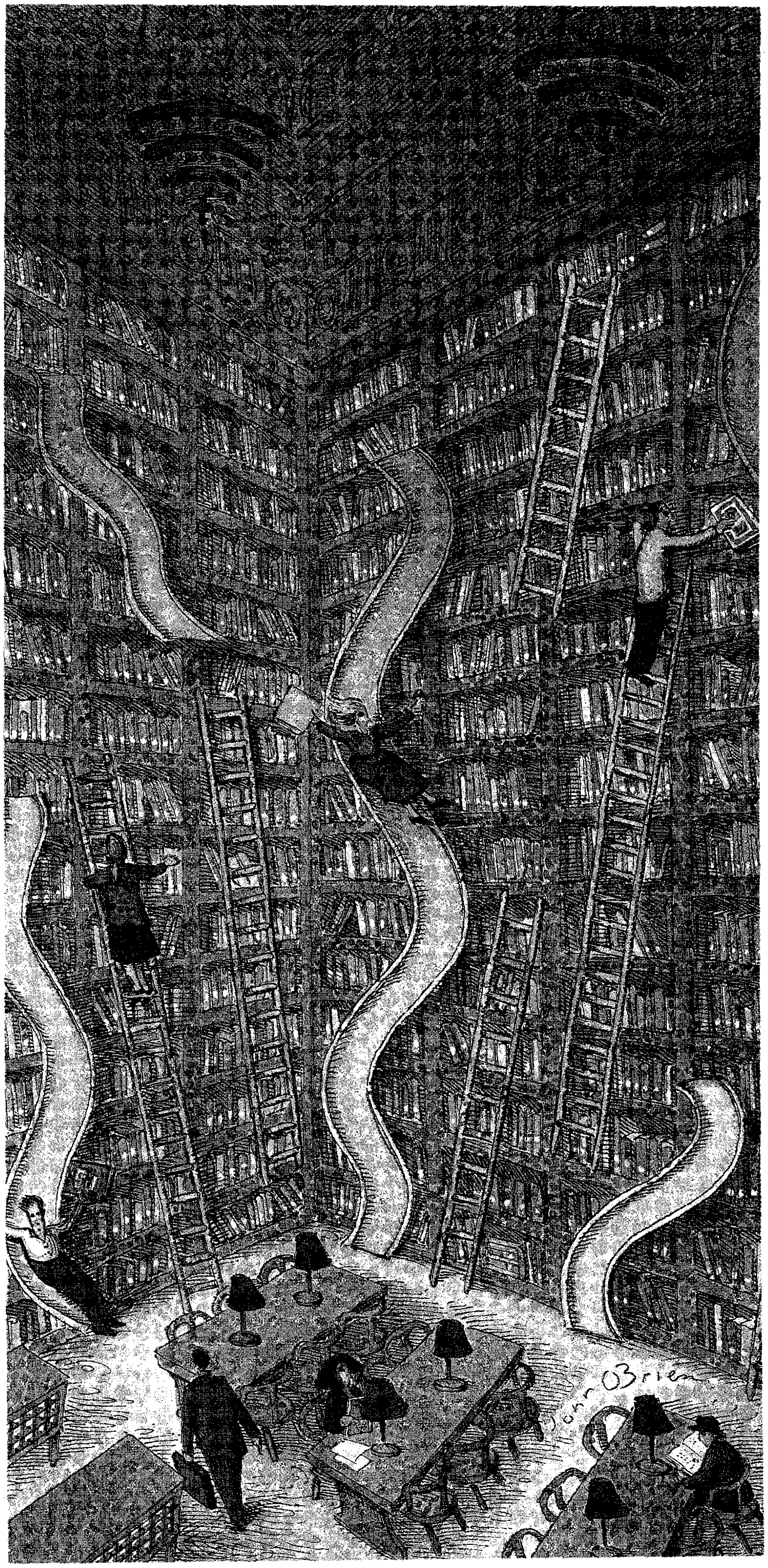
"What's awkward, Mr. Leary?"

"It isn't easy, how to put it to you. I didn't come before because of your trouble."

Alicia laid down the cloth with

"Trisha, my novellas about Rommel in Egypt, the plays about the Great Depression, my novel of the Second World War—don't you know they're all about you?"

INFORMATION PATHWAYS



which she had been applying Goddard's Silver Polish to the cutlery, and Catherine watched her sister's slow, deliberate movements as she shined the last of the forks and then drew off her pink rubber gloves and placed them one on top of the other, beside her. Alicia could sense something; she often had a way of knowing what was coming next.

"I don't know are you aware," Leary inquired, addressing only Catherine, "it wasn't paid for?"

"What wasn't?"

"The job I done for you."

"You don't mean painting the front?"

"I do, ma'am."

"But of course it was paid for."

He sighed softly. An outstanding bill was an embarrassment, he said. Because of the death it was an embarrassment.

"My husband paid for the work that was done."

"Ah no, no."

The frown Catherine had checked a few moments ago wrinkled her forehead. She knew the bill had been paid. She knew because Matthew had said Leary would want cash, and she had taken the money out of her own Irish Nationwide account, since she had easy access to it. "I'll see you right at the end of the month," Matthew had promised. It was an arrangement they often had; the building-society account in he name existed for this kind of thing.

"Two hundred and twenty-six pounds is the extent of the damage." Leary smiled shiftily. "With the discount for cash."

She didn't tell him she'd withdraw the money herself. That wasn't his business. She watched the extreme tip o his tongue licking his upper lip. H wiped his mouth with the back of paint-stained hand. Softly, Alicia wa replacing forks and spoons in the cutlery container.

"It was September the account wa sent out. The wife does all that type o thing."

"The bill was paid promptly. M husband always paid bills promptly."

She remembered the occasion per fectly. "I'll bring it down to him now," Matthew had said, glancing across th kitchen at the clock. Every evening h walked down to McKenny's bar and re mained there for three-quarters of a hour or so, depending on the compan That evening he'd have gone the lon way round, by French Street, in order to call in at the Learys' house, in Brady's Lane. Before he left he had taken the notes from the brown Nationwide envelope and counted them, slowly, just as she herself had done earlier. She'd seen the bill in his hand. "Chancing his arm with the tax man," she remembered his remarking lightly, a reference to Leary's preference for cash.

On his return he would have hung his cap on its hook in the scullery passage and settled down at the kitchen table with the *Evening Press*, which he bought in Healy's sweetshop on his way back from McKenny's. He went to the public house for conversation as much as anything, and afterward passed on to Alicia and herself any news he had gleaned. Bottled Smithwick's was his drink.

"D'you remember it?" Catherine appealed to her sister, because although she could herself so clearly recall Matthew's departure from the house on that particular September evening, his return eluded her. It lay smothered somewhere beneath the evening routine, nothing making it special, as the banknotes in the envelope had made the other.

"I remember talk about money," Alicia recalled, "earlier that day. If I've got it right, I was out at the Legion of Mary in the evening."

"A while back the wife noticed the way the bill was unpaid," Leary went on, having paused politely to hear these recollections. " 'It's the death that's in it,' she said. She'd have eaten the face off me if I'd bothered you in your trouble."

"Excuse me," Catherine said.

She left the kitchen and went to look on the spike in the side cupboard in the passage, where all receipts were kept. This one should have been close to the top, but it wasn't. It wasn't farther down either. It wasn't in the cupboard drawers. She went through the contents of three box files in case it had been bundled into one in error. Again she didn't find it.

She returned to the kitchen with the next best thing: the Nationwide Building Society account book. She opened it and placed it in front of Leary. She pointed at the entry that recorded the withdrawal of two hundred and twenty-six pounds. She could tell that there had been no conversation in her absence. Leary would have tried to get some kind of talk going, but Alicia wouldn't have responded.

"September the eighth," Catherine said, emphasizing the printed date with a forefinger. "A Wednesday, it was."

In silence Leary perused the entry. He shook his head. The tight features of his face tightened even more, bunching together into a knot of bewilderment. Catherine glanced at her sister. He was putting it on, Alicia's expression indicated.

"The money was taken out, all right," Leary said eventually. "Did he put it to another use in that case?"

"Another use?"

"Did you locate a receipt, missus?"

He spoke softly, not in the cagey, underhand tone of someone attempting to get something for nothing. Catherine was still standing. He turned his head to one side in order to squint up at her. He sounded apologetic, but all that could be put on also.

"I brought the receipt book over with me," he said.

He handed it to her, a fat, greasy notebook with a gray marbled cover that had "The Challenge Receipt Book" printed on it. Blue carbon paper protruded from the dog-eared pages.

"Any receipt that's issued would have a copy left behind here," he said, speaking now to Alicia, across the table. "The top copy for the customer, the carbon for ourselves. You couldn't do business without you keep a record of receipts."

He stood up then. He opened the book and displayed its unused pages, each with the same printed heading: "In account with T. P. Leary." He showed Catherine how the details of a bill were recorded on the flimsy page beneath the carbon sheet and how, when a bill was paid, acknowledgment was recorded also: "Paid with thanks," with the date and the careful scrawl of Mrs. Leary's signature. He passed the receipt book to Alicia, pointing out these details to her also.

"Anything could have happened to that receipt," Alicia said. "In the circumstances."

"If a receipt was issued, missus, there'd be a record of it here."

Alicia placed the receipt book beside the much slimmer building-society book on the pale surface of the table. Leary's attention remained with the former, his scrutiny an emphasis of the facts it contained. The evidence offered otherwise was not for him to comment upon: so the steadiness of his gaze insisted.

"My husband counted those notes at this very table," Catherine said. "He took them out of the brown envelope that they were put into at the Nationwide."

"It's a mystery so."

It wasn't any such thing; there was no mystery whatsoever. The bill had been paid. Both sisters knew that; in their different ways they guessed that Leary—and presumably his wife as well—had planned this dishonesty as soon as they realized that death had given them the opportunity. Matthew had obliged them by paying cash so that they could defraud the taxation authorities. He had further obliged them by dying.

Catherine said, "My husband walked out of this house with that envelope in his pocket. Are you telling me he didn't reach you?"

"Was he robbed? Would it be that? You hear terrible things these days."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!"

Leary wagged his head in his meditative way. It was unlikely certainly, he agreed. Anyone robbed would have gone to the Guards. Anyone robbed would have mentioned it when he came back to the house again.

"The bill was paid, Mr. Leary."

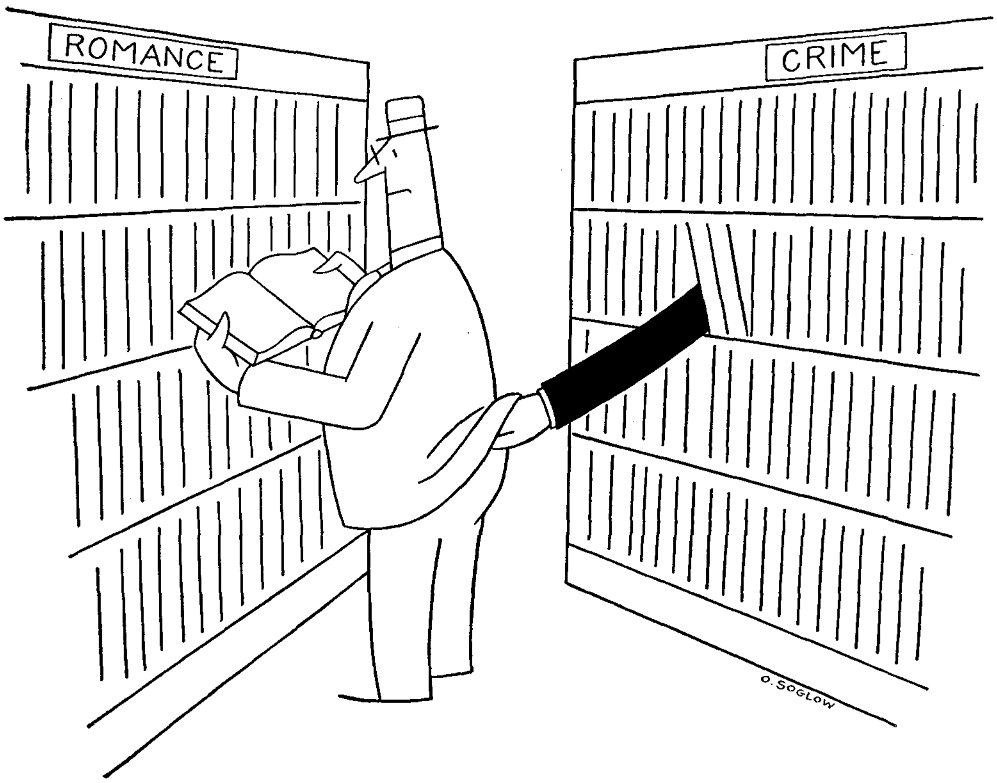
"All the same, we have to go by the receipt. At the heel of the hunt there's the matter of a receipt."

Alicia shook her head. Either a receipt wasn't issued in the first place, she said, or else it had been mislaid. "There's a confusion when a person dies," she said.

If Catherine had been able to produce the receipt Leary would have blamed his wife. He'd have blandly stated that she'd got her wires crossed. He'd have said the first thing that came into his head and then have gone away.

"The only thing is," he said instead, "a sum like that is sizable. I couldn't afford to let it go."

Both Catherine and Alicia had seen Mrs. Leary in the shops, red-haired, like a tinker, a bigger woman than her husband, probably the brains of the two. The Learys were liars and worse than liars; the chance had come and the temp-



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tation had been too much for them. “Ah, sure, those two have plenty,” the woman would have said. The sisters wondered if the Learys had tricked the bereaved before, and imagined they had.

Leary said, “It’s hard on a man that’s done work for you.”

Catherine moved toward the kitchen door. Leary ambled after her down the hall. She remembered the evening more clearly even than a while ago. A Wednesday it definitely had been, the day of the Sweetman girl’s wedding; and also, it came back to her, Alicia hurrying out on her Legion of Mary business. There’d been talk in McKenny’s about the wedding, the unusual choice of mid-week, which apparently had something to do with visitors coming from America. She opened the hall door in silence. Across the street, beyond the silver-colored railings, the children were still running about in the convent yard. Watery sunlight lightened the unadorned concrete of the classrooms and the nuns’ house.

“What’ll I do?” Leary asked, wide-eyed, bloodshot, squinting at her.

Catherine said nothing.

THEY talked about it. It could be, Alicia said, that the receipt had remained in one of Matthew’s pockets, that a jacket she had disposed of to one of her charities had later found itself in the Learys’ hands, having passed through a jumble sale. She could imagine Mrs. Leary coming across it, and the temptation being too much. Leary was as weak as water, she said, adding that the tinker wife was a woman who never looked you in the eye. Foxy-faced and furtive, Mrs. Leary pushed a ramshackle pram about the streets, her ragged children cowering in her presence. It was she who would have removed the flimsy carbon copy from the soiled receipt book. Leary would have been putty in her hands.

In the kitchen they sat down at the table, from which Alicia had cleared away the polished cutlery. Matthew had died as tidily as he’d lived, Alicia said: all his life he’d been meticulous. The Learys had failed to remember that. If it came to a court of law the Learys wouldn’t have a leg to stand on, with the written evidence that the precise amount taken out of the building society matched the amount of the bill, and further evidence in Matthew’s reputation for promptness about settling debts.

“What I’m wondering is,” Alicia said, “should we go to the Guards?”

“The Guards?”

“He shouldn’t have come here like that.”

That evening there arrived a bill for the amount quoted by Leary, marked “Account rendered.” It was dropped through the letter box and was discovered the next morning beneath the *Irish Independent* on the hall doormat.

“The little twister!” Alicia furiously exclaimed.

From the road outside the house came the morning commands of the convent girl in charge of the crossing to the school: “Get ready!” “Prepare to cross!” “Cross now!” Impertinence had been added to dishonesty, Alicia declared in outraged tones. It was as though it had never been pointed out to Leary that Matthew had left the house on the evening in question with two hundred and twenty-six pounds in an envelope, that Leary’s attention had never been drawn to the clear evidence of the building-society entry.

“It beats me,” Catherine said, and in the hall Alicia turned sharply and said it was as clear as day. Again she mentioned going to the Guards. A single visit from Sergeant McBride, she maintained, and the Learys would abandon their cheek. From the play yard the yells of the girls increased as more girls arrived there, and then the handbell sounded; a moment later there was silence.

“I’m only wondering,” Catherine said, “if there’s some kind of a mistake.”

“There’s no mistake, Catherine.”

Alicia didn’t comment further. She led the way to the kitchen and half filled a saucepan with water for their two boiled eggs. Catherine cut bread for toast. When she and Alicia had been girls in that same play yard she hadn’t known of Matthew’s existence. Years passed before she even noticed him, at Mass one Saturday night. And it was ages before he first invited her to go ou with him, for a walk the first time, and then for a drive.

“What d’you think happened, then? Alicia asked. “That Matthew bet th money on a dog? That he owed it fo drink consumed? Have sense, Catherine.

Had it been Alicia’s own husband whom Leary had charged with negli gence, there would have been no necessary suspension of disbelief: feckless and a nuisance, involved during his marriage with at least one other woman in the town, frequenter of racecourses and dog tracks and bars, he had ended in an early grave. This shared thought—that behavior which was ludicrous when attached to Matthew had been as natural in Alicia's husband as breathing—was there between the sisters, but was not mentioned.

"If Father Cahill got Leary on his own," Alicia began, but Catherine interrupted. She didn't want that, she said; she didn't want other people brought into this, not even Father Cahill. She didn't want a fuss about whether or not her husband had paid a bill.

"You'll get more of these," Alicia warned, laying a finger on the envelope that had been put through the letter box. "They'll keep on coming."

"Yes."

In the night Catherine had lain awake, wondering if Matthew had maybe lost the money on his walk to the Learys' house that evening, if he'd put his hand in his pocket and found it wasn't there and then been too ashamed to say. It wasn't like him; it didn't make much more sense than thinking he had been a secretive man, with private shortcomings all the years she'd been married to him. When Alicia's husband died Matthew had said it was hard to feel sorry, and she'd agreed. Three times Alicia had been left on her own, for periods that vared in length, and on each occasion they'd thought the man was gone for good; but he returned and Alicia always took him back. Of course Matthew hadn't lost he money: it was as silly to hink that as to wonder if he'd been a gambler.

"In case they'd try it on anyone else," Alicia was aying, "isn't it better they hould be shown up? Is a man who'd get up to that kind of game safe to be left in people's houses the way workman is?"

That morning they didn't mention the matter again. They washed up the breakast dishes and then Catherine went out to the shops, which was always her chore, while Alicia cleaned the stairs and the hall, the day being a Thursday. As Catherine made her way through the familiar streets, and while Mr. Deegan sliced bacon for her and then while Gilligan greeted her in the hardware, she thought about the journey her husband had made that Wednesday evening in September. Involuntarily, she glanced into Healy's, where he had bought the *Evening Press*, and into McKenny's bar. Every evening except Sunday, he had brought back the news, bits of gossip, anything he'd heard. It was at this time, too, that he went to confession, on such occasions leaving the house half an hour earlier.

In French Street, a countrywoman opened her car door without looking and knocked a cyclist over. "Ah, no harm done," the youth on the bicycle said. He was the delivery boy for Lawless, the West Street butcher, the last delivery boy in the town. "Sure, I never saw him at all," the countrywoman protested to Catherine as she went by. The car door was dinged, but the woman said what did it matter if the lad was all right?

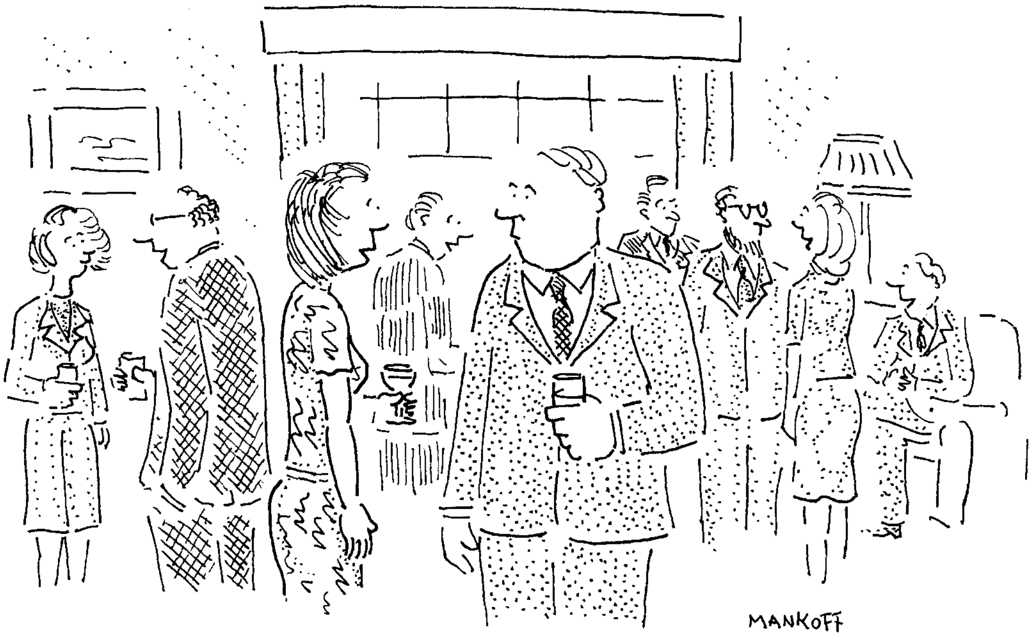
Culliney, the traveller from Limerick Shirts, was in town that day. Matthew had always bought his shirts direct from Culliney, the same striped pattern, the stripe blue or brown. Culliney had his measurements, the way he had the measurements of men all over Munster and Connacht, which was his area. Catherine could tell when she saw Culliney coming toward her that he didn't know about the death, and she braced herself to tell him. When she did so he put a hand on her arm and spoke in a whisper, saying that Matthew had been a good man. If there was anything he could ever do, he said, if there was any way he could help. More people said that than didn't.

It was then that Catherine saw Mrs. Leary. The housepainter's wife was pushing her pram, a child holding on to it as she advanced. Catherine crossed to the other side of the street, wondering if the woman had seen her and suspecting she had. In Jerety's she selected a pan loaf from the yesterday's, since neither she nor Alicia liked fresh bread and yesterday's was always reduced. When she emerged, Mrs. Leary was not to be seen.

"Nothing, only a woman knocked young Nallen off his bike," she reported to Alicia when she returned to the house. "Is he a Nallen, that boy of Lawless's?"

"Or a Keane, is he? Big head on him?"

"I don't think he's a Keane. Someone told me a Nallen. Whoever he is, there's no harm done." She didn't say she'd seen Mrs. Leary, because she didn't want to raise again the subject of what had occurred. She knew that Alicia was right: the bill would keep



"I haven't read it yet, but I've downloaded it from the Internet."

coming unless she did something about it. Once they'd set out on the course they'd chosen, why should the Learys give up? Alicia didn't refer to the Learys either, but that evening, when they had switched off the television and were preparing to go to bed, Catherine said, "I think I'll pay them. Simplest, that would be."

With her right hand on the newel of the bannister, about to ascend the stairs, Alicia stared in disbelief at her sister. When Catherine nodded and continued on her way to the kitchen she followed her.

"But you can't." Alicia stood in the doorway while Catherine washed and rinsed the cups they'd drunk their bedtime tea from. "You can't just pay them what isn't owing."

Catherine turned the tap off at the sink and set the cups to drain, slipping the accompanying saucers between the plastic bars of the drainer. Tomorrow she would withdraw the same sum from the building-society account and take it herself to the Learys in Brady's Lane. She would stand there while a receipt was issued.

"Catherine, you can't hand out more than two hundred pounds."

"I'd rather."

As she spoke, she changed her mind about the detail of the payment. Matthew had been obliging Leary by paying cash, but there was no need to oblige him anymore. She would arrange for the Irish Nationwide to draw a check payable to T. P. Leary. She would bring it round to the Learys instead of a wad of notes.

"They've taken you for a fool," Alicia said.

"I know they have."

"Leary should go behind bars. You're aiding and abetting him. Have sense, woman."

A disappointment rose in Alicia, bewildering and muddled. The death of her own husband had brought an end, and her expectation had been that widowhood for her sister would be the same. Her expectation had been that in their shared state they would be as once they were, now that marriage was over, packed away with their similar mourning clothes. Yet almost palpable in the kitchen was Catherine's resolve that what still remained for her should not be damaged by a fuss of protest over a confidence trick. The Guards investigating clothes sold at a jumble sale, strangers asked if a housepainter's wife had bought this garment or that, private intimacies made public: Catherine was paying money in case, somehow, the memory of her husband should be accidentally tarnished. And knowing her sister well, Alicia knew that this resolve would become more stubborn as time passed. It would mark and influence her sister; it would breed new eccentricities in her. If Leary had not come that day there would have been something else.

"You'd have the man back, I suppose?" Alicia said, trying to hurt and knowing she succeeded. "You'd have him back in to paint again, to lift the bits and pieces from your dressing table?"

"It's not to do with Leary."

"What's it to do with then?"

"Let's leave it."

Hanging up a tea towel, Catherine noticed that her fingers were trembling. They never quarrelled; even in childhood they hadn't. In all the years Alicia had lived in the house she had never spoken in this unpleasant way, her voice rudely raised.

"They're walking all over you, Catherine."

"Yes."

They did not speak again, not even to say good night. Alicia closed her bedroom door, telling herself crossly that her expectation had not been a greedy one. She had been unhappy in her foolish marriage, and after it she had been beholden in this house. Although it ran against her nature to do so, she had borne her lot without complaint; why should she not fairly have hoped that in widowhood they would again be sisters first of all?

In her bedroom Catherine undressed and for a moment caught a glimpse of the nakedness in her dressing-table looking glass. She missed her husband's warmth in bed, a hand holding hers before they slept, that last embrace, and sometimes in the night his voice saying he loved her. She pulled her nightdress on, then knelt to pray before she turned the light out.

Some instinct, vague and imprecise, drew her in the darkness on to the territory of Alicia's disappointment. In the family photographs—some clearly defined, some now drained of detail, affected by the sun—they were the sisters they had been: Alicia beautiful, confidently smiling; Catherine in her care. Catherine's first memory was of a yellow flower, and sunlight, and a white cloth hat put on her head. That flower was a cowslip, Alicia told her afterward, and said that they'd gone with their mother to the ruins by the river that day, that it was she who found the cowslip. "Look, Catherine," she'd said. "A lovely flower." Catherine had watched in admiration when Alicia paraded in her First Communion dress, and later when boys paid her attention. Alicia was the important one, responsible, reliable, right about things, offered the deference that was an older sister's due She'd been a strength, Catherine said after Matthew's funeral, and Alicia was pleased, even though she shook he head.

Catherine dropped into sleep afte half an hour of wakefulness. She woke up a few times in the night, on each occasion to find her thoughts full of the decision she had made, and of he sister's outraged face, the two tiny patches of red that had come into it high up on her cheeks, the snap of disdain in her eyes. "A laughingstock," Alicia said in a dream. "No more than laughingstock, Catherine."

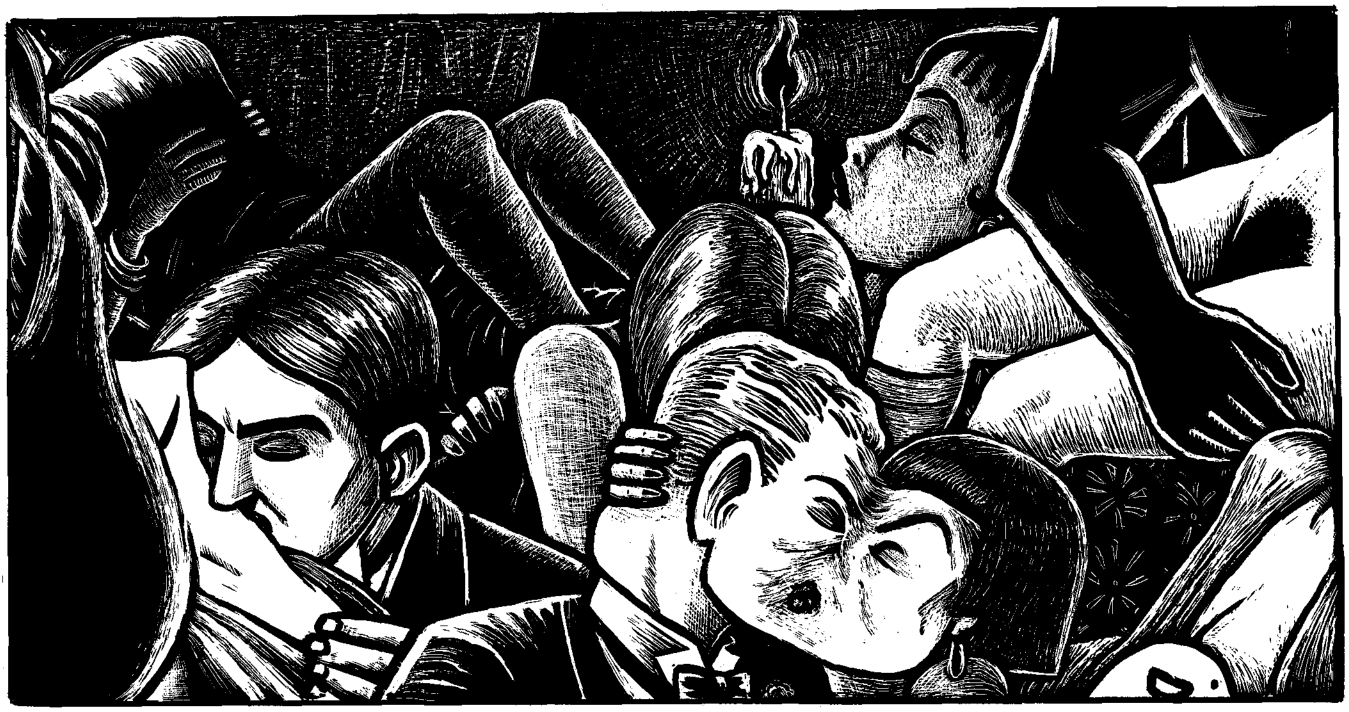
As Catherine lay there she imagined the silent breakfast there would be, and saw herself walking to Brady's Lane and Leary fiddling with his cigarette making gadget, and Mrs. Leary in fluff pink slippers, her stockingless leg mottled from being too close to the fire Tea would be offered, but Catherin would refuse it. "A decenter man neve stood in a pair of shoes," Leary could b counted upon to state.

She did not sleep again. She watche the darkness lighten, heard the first car of the day pass on the road outside th house. By chance, a petty dishonest had given death its due, which Alici had cheated it of when she was widowed herself. It took from her now, it had not then.

Catherine knew this intuition was n trick of her tired mind. While they wer widows in her house Alicia's jealous would be the truth they shared, wit *tonight's few moments of its presenc* lingering insistently. Widows were widows first. Catherine would mourn, an feel in solitude the warmth of love. F Alicia there was the memory of h beauty. ◆

THE WILD PARTY

BY JOSEPH MONCURE MARCH • DRAWINGS BY ART SPIEGELMAN



JOSEPH MONCURE MARCH'S "The Wild Party"—the first part of which follows—is a hardboiled Jazz Age tragedy told in syncopated rhyming couplets. It has the mnemonic tenacity, if not the wholesomeness, of a nursery rhyme, and to read it once is to get large shards of it permanently lodged in the brain:

> Queenie was a blonde, and her age stood still,
> And she danced twice a day in vaudeville.

Queenie and Burrs, her man of the moment, have a violent spat. They patch it up by tossing a drunken party for their low-ife pals, one of whom brings along Black, an innocent young uptown swell. Black falls for Queenie, and they end up in the back room. ("Some love is fire: some love s rust:/But the fiercest, cleanest love is ust.") Burrs staggers in and a scuffle enues. He pulls out a gun. Black wrests it rom him. It fires, killing Burrs, and the poem hurtles at bullet speed into the wall of its abrupt last lines:

> The door sprang open
> And the cops rushed in.

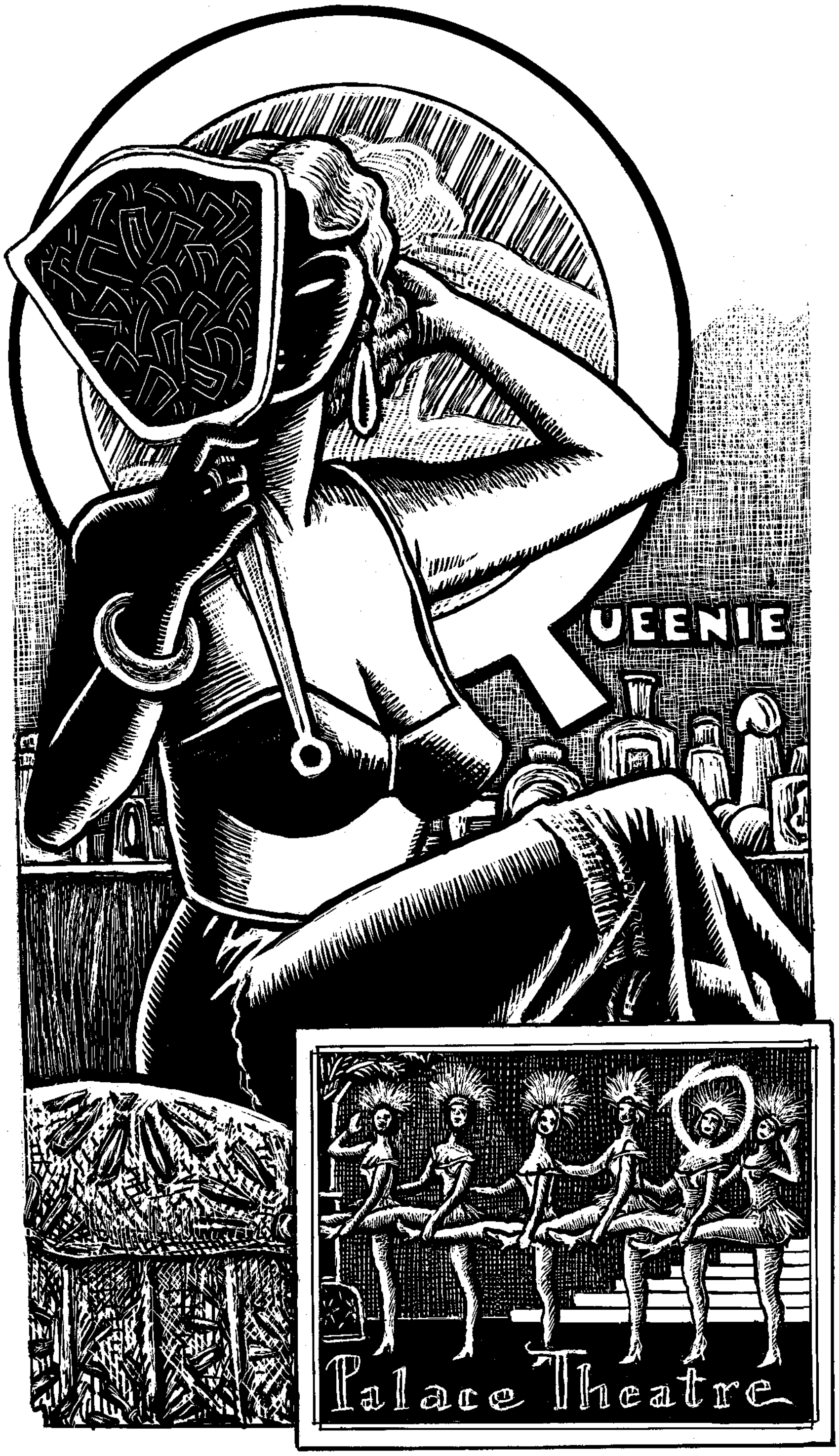
"The Wild Party" is closer to "Frankie & Johnny" than to "Tristan and Iseult," ven though March had been a protégé of Robert Frost's at Amherst and knew his way around villanelles as well as around speakeasies. It owes as much to the sizzle of tabloids, the lyrics and rhythms of hot jazz, and the closeups and cuts of silent films as it does to any earlier narrative verse. The twenty-six-year-old March improvised "The Wild Party," a few lines a day, over the summer of 1926, soon after quitting *The New Yorker*. He had been the fledgling magazine's first managing editor (or "Jesus," as the staff came to christen the difficult post). Too sensitive to withstand Harold Ross's abrasive style for long, he decided to make his way as a poet—a career choice underwritten by an indulgent father.

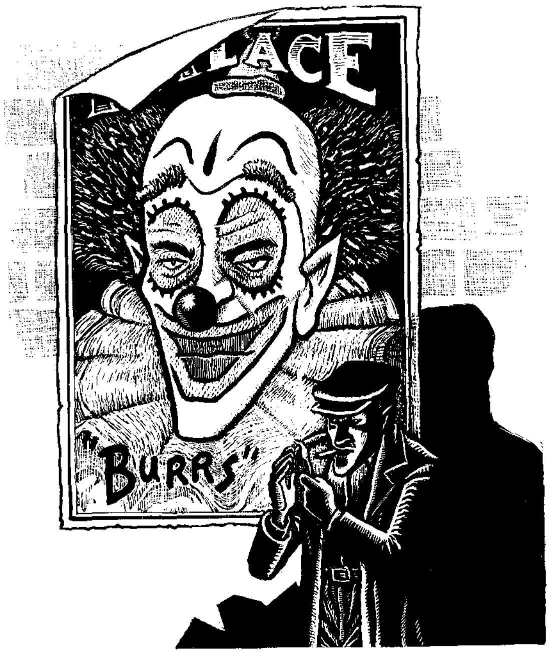
The poem was considered too hot to publish until 1928, when a limited edition of seven hundred and fifty copies was released by Covici. It became a succès de scandale (and would be banned in Boston). March immediately followed it with "The Set-Up," the story of a washed-up black boxer, which is similar in structure to "The Wild Party," but without its sexual charge. "The Set-Up" made the *Times* best-seller list, whereupon March moved to Hollywood and worked on screenplays throughout the next decade. Most notably, he collaborated on the story and provided dialogue for "Hell's Angels," the 1930 talkie that made Jean Harlow—the embodiment of Queenie—a star. March died in 1977, his two major works underappreciated, despite a cult following that includes William Burroughs, who credits "The Wild Party" with having made him want to become a writer.

My desire to illustrate "The Wild Party" grows from something beyond a yen for the innocent hedonism of the boop-a-doop and vo-de-oh-do twenties, although I confess to a powerful nostalgia for all decades that precede my birth. We've already lived through each decade of the century at least twice. In the postmodern moment, we can see them all simultaneously—the austerity of the thirties, the genocide of the forties, the platform shoes of the seventies—as we plummet into the millennium, as if we were drowning and watching our past flash before us. Perhaps it's March's perfectly pitched tone of bewildered innocence curdled into worldly cynicism that resonates so well in our nineties. March's "lost" generation saw civilization come unglued by the War to End All Wars. Our "foundering" generation has recently seen the End of History. His generation swilled bathtub gin and had a wild party. Ours takes Prozac and waits for the cops to rush in.—ART SPIEGELMAN

Queenie was a blonde,
and her age stood still,
And she danced twice a day in vaudeville.
Grey eyes.
Lips like coals aglow.
Her face was a tinted mask of snow.
What hips—
What shoulders—
What a back she had!
Her legs were built to drive men mad.
And she did.
She would skid
But sooner or later they bored her:
Sixteen a year was her order.

They might be blackguards;
They might be curs;
They might be actors; sports;
chauffeurs—
She never inquired
Of the men she desired
About their social status, or wealth:
She was only concerned about
their health.
True:
She knew:
There was little she hadn't been through.
And she liked her lovers violent, and vicious:
Queenie was
sexually ambitious.
So:
Now you know.
A fascinating woman, as they go.





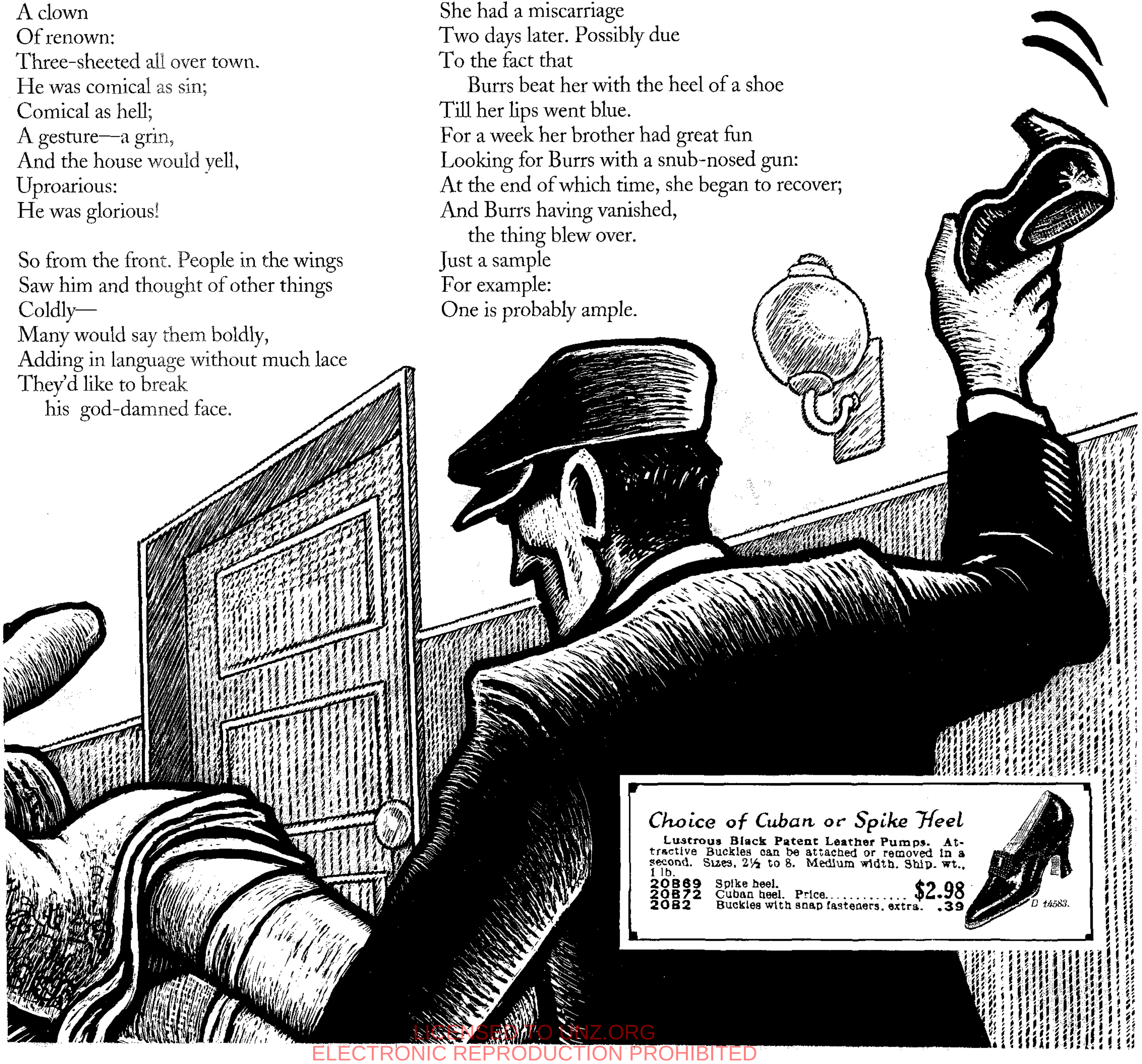
She lived at present with a man named Burrs
Whose act came on just after hers.
A clown
Of renown:
Three-sheeted all over town.
He was comical as sin;
Comical as hell;
A gesture—a grin,
And the house would yell,
Uproarious:
He was glorious!

So from the front. People in the wings
Saw him and thought of other things
Coldly—
Many would say them boldly,
Adding in language without much lace
They'd like to break
    his god-damned face.

Ask why?
They might be stuck:
They would like to, just for luck.

But these were men, for the greater part.
A woman would offer him up her heart
Throbbing,
On a platter:
He could bite it, and it wouldn't matter.
As long as he kissed, and held her tight,
And gave her a fairly hectic night.
Which he could,
And would.
A man these women understood!

Oh, yes—Burrs was a charming fellow:
Brutal with women, and proportionately yellow.
Once he had been forced into a marriage.
Unlucky girl!
She had a miscarriage
Two days later. Possibly due
To the fact that
    Burrs beat her with the heel of a shoe
Till her lips went blue.
For a week her brother had great fun
Looking for Burrs with a snub-nosed gun:
At the end of which time, she began to recover;
And Burrs having vanished,
    the thing blew over.
Just a sample
For example:
One is probably ample.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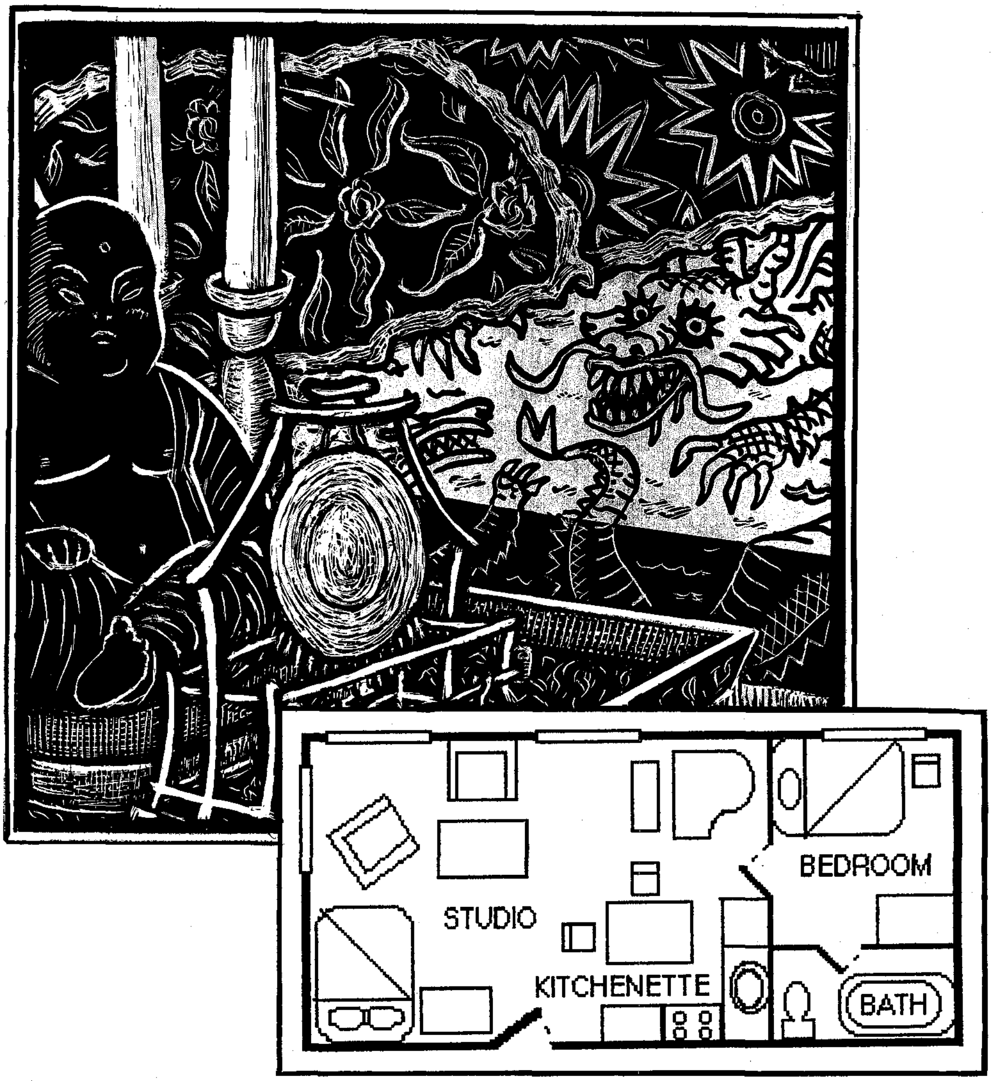
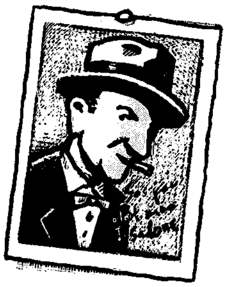


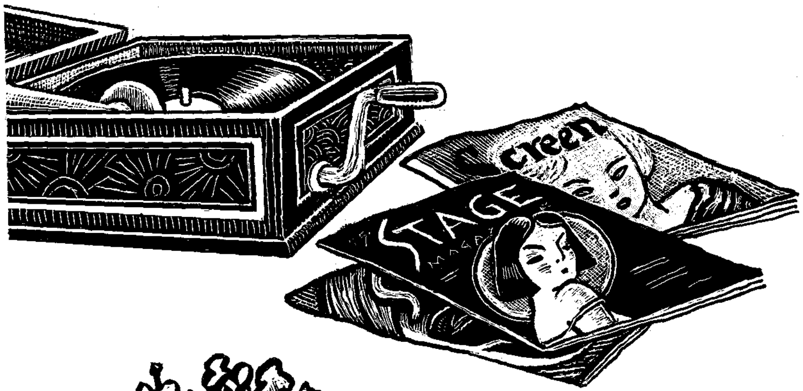
Studio;
Bedroom;
Bath;
Kitchenette:
Furnished like a third act passion set:
Oriental;
Sentimental;
They owed two months on the rental.

Pink cushions,
Blue cushions: overlaid
With silk: with lace: with gold brocade.
These lay propped up on a double bed
That was covered with a Far East
    tapestry spread.

Chinese dragons with writhing backs:
Photographs caught to the wall with tacks:
Their friends in the profession,
Celebrities for the impression—
("So's your old man—Isidore."
"Faithfully—Ethel Barrymore.")



On a Chinese lacquer tray
    there stood a
Gong with tassels,
    and a brass Buddha.
Brass candlesticks.
Orange candles.
An Art vase with broken handles,
Out of which came an upthrusting
Of cherry blossoms that needed dusting.



Books?
Books?
My god! You don't understand.
They were far too busy living first-hand
For books.
Books!

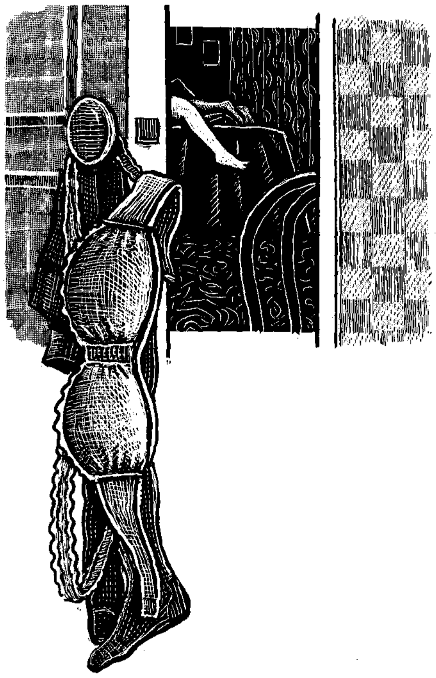
True,
On the table there lay a few
Tattered copies of a magazine,
Confessional;
Professional;
That talked of their friends on the
stage and screen.

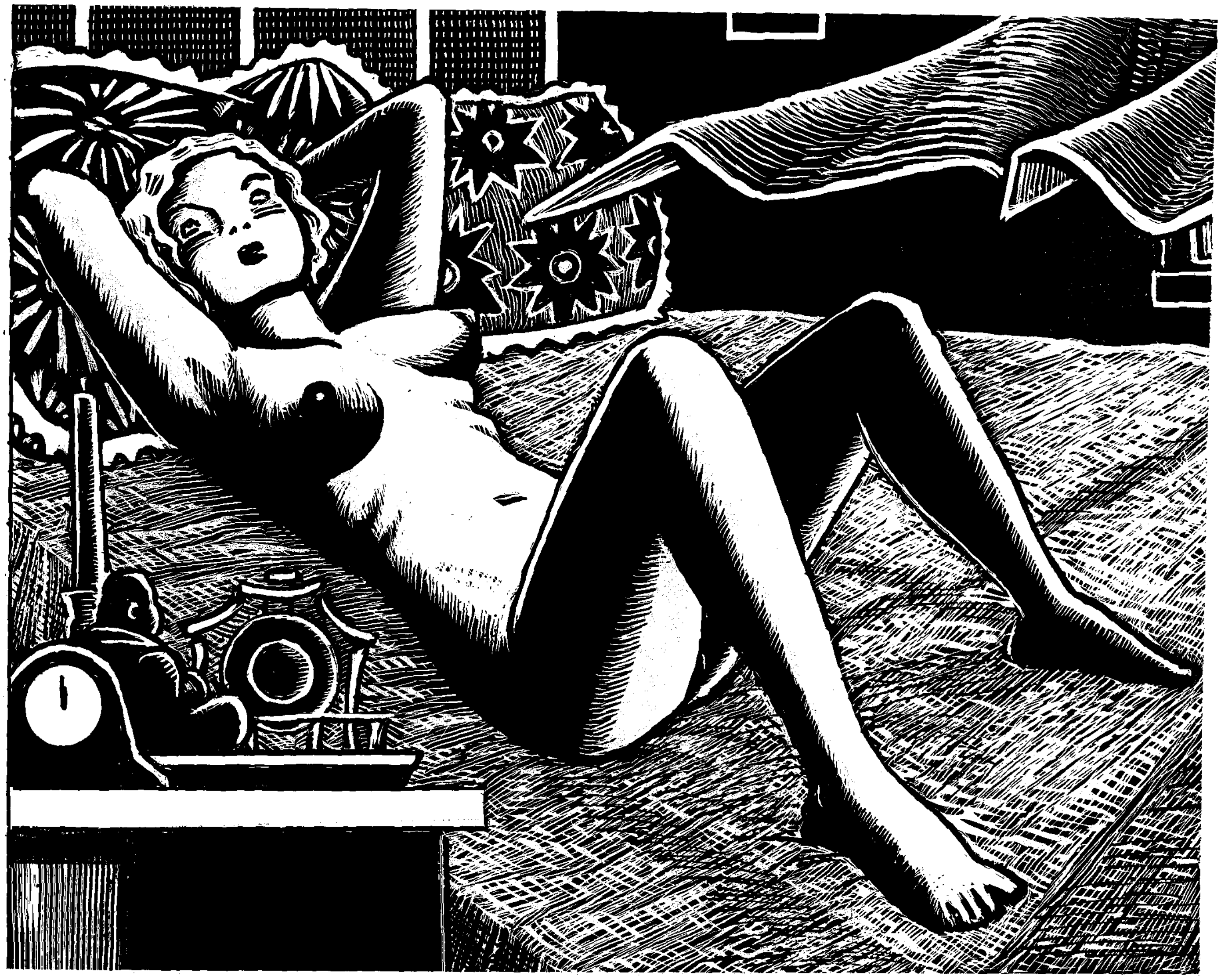
A Victrola with records
Just went to show
Queenie's Art on the man two floors below.
Being a person of little guile,
He had lent them to her, for just awhile.
Believe it or not—
All this for a smile!

A grand piano stood in the corner
With the air of a coffin
waiting for a mourner.

The bath was a horrible give-away.
The floor was dirty:
The towels were grey.
Cups, saucers,
Knives, plates,
Bottles, glasses
In various states
Of vileness, fought for precarious space in
The jumbled world beneath the basin.
The basin top was the temporary home
Of a corkscrew, scissors,
And a brush and comb.
In the basin bowel
Was a Pullman towel
Vividly wrought with red streaks
From Queenie's perfect lips and cheeks.
Behind one faucet, in a stain of rust,
Spattered with talcum powder and dust,
A razor blade had lived for weeks.
Beside it was stuck a cigarette stub.
And the tub?
Oh—never mind the tub!
On the door-knob there hung a pair
Of limp stockings, and a brassière
Too soiled to wear.

Of the bedroom,
Nothing much to be said.
It had a bureau:
A double bed
With one pillow, and white spread.
Their trunks: boxes.
A chair.
The walls were white and bare.
Only occasional guests slept there:
Queenie and Burrs, preferring air,
Slept with the Chinese dragons instead.

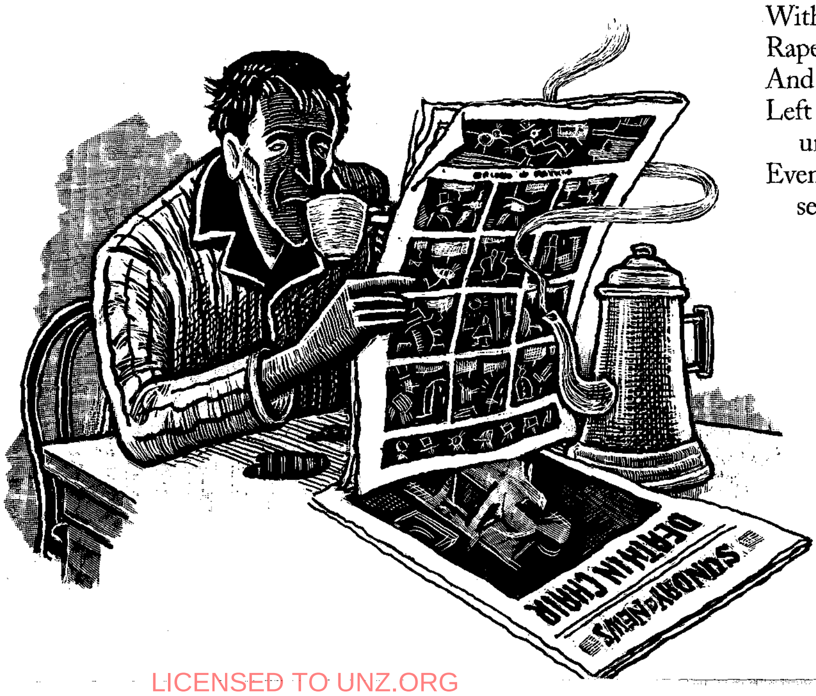




Sunday noon:
Broiling hot.
Queenie woke up feeling shot.
She lay stretched out on the
crumpled bed
Naked: slim arms above her head.
She stared at the ceiling;
She stared at her feet;
She stared at the clock,
And she cursed the heat
Faintly:
Quaintly.
She looked exquisite; saintly.

Burrs was up,
Ugly; silent;
Unshaven; dressed in a pair of violent
Pink pyjamas, badly crumpled.
His eyes were pouched.
His hair was rumpled.

He sat brooding like a captive satyr
Over a cup and a percolator.
He was gross;
Morose.
The Sunday *Tabloid* spread before him
Rather unusually well supplied
With murder,
Rape,
And suicide,
Left him cold:
unsatisfied.
Even the comics
seemed to bore hi



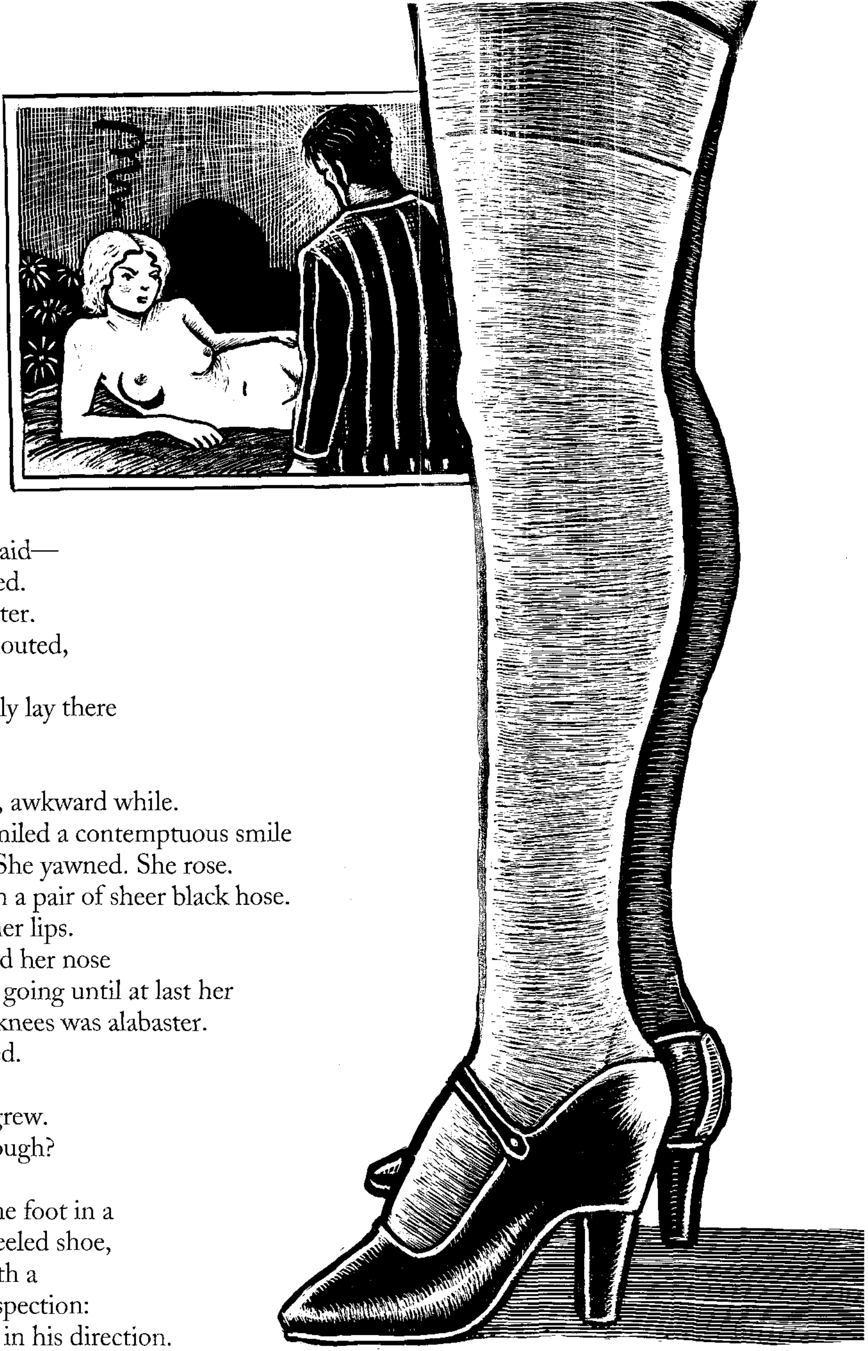
Queenie lifted her head
A trifle from the bed.
Burrsie!" she piped.
Ier voice was pitched
n a fretful key.
Iis mouth twitched:
Ie was dangerously still,
By enormous power of will.
Ier eyes filled with a martyred look:
She registered grief, and her voice
 shook.
Burrsie!"
harply—
Well?" he inquired.
Burrsie! Queenie is oh, so tired!"

Iis teeth snapped.
Ie was glittering-eyed.
'or a moment or so he could not decide
Vhether it would be best to throttle
Or brain this woman with a
 nearby bottle.
woman who slept
ike a corpse under sod,
nd woke up tired!
lmighty God!

Iis nerves jangled.
Ie saw red.
Ie said nothing: but Queenie did,
rom the region of the bed,
eevishly:
Burrsie! Pour out a cup for me!"
aid she.

The hell I will, you lazy slut!
'o you think you're the Prince of
 Wales,
r what?"
'ense
lence,
oreboding sudden violence.

ueenie rolled up on to her side.
ne looked Burrs over, narrow-eyed.
er eyebrows rose
n a vicious slant:
er mouth and chin grew adamant.



Burrs was afraid—
Already routed.
He tried bluster.
"Well!" he shouted,
Glaring:
But she simply lay there
Staring.

So for a long, awkward while.
At last she smiled a contemptuous smile
At nothing. She yawned. She rose.
She pulled on a pair of sheer black hose.
She rouged her lips.
She powdered her nose
And kept on going until at last her
Flesh to the knees was alabaster.
Burrs watched.

The silence grew.
Was she through?
Who knew!
She thrust one foot in a
 French-heeled shoe,
And gave both a
 critical inspection:
Never a look in his direction.

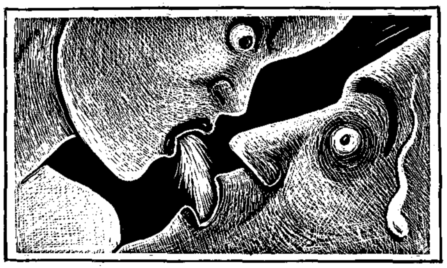
The silence chilled his brain.
"Queenie!"
Silence.
Again:
"Queenie!—Hell!"
He was stubborn now:
He'd make her talk, no matter how!
He set his teeth,
Swallowed his pride;
Rose:
Slunk over:
Crouched at her side.
"Queenie!"
He seized her arm; shook it.

She may have been pleased,
But she didn't look it.
Her eyes flashed:
No truce!

She wrenched her arm loose.
Up she leapt, white faced.

He lunged:
His arms went around her waist:
They tightened: they locked:
They crushed her thin.
For a moment, she writhed;
Then she gave in.

He pulled her backwards,
And her soft, slim
Body flew down and covered him.
His face was pressed
Deep in her breast.
She loosened.
She waited.
She lay still,
Giving his hands and lips their will.
She was cold as ice, all through it:
She had him now,
And she knew it.
His heart quickened:



His breath thickened.
She covered his mouth
    with a kiss like flame;
And he quivered; and he gasped;
    And he almost came.

Now,
Swift as a snake,
She shifted.

Her shoulders rose.
Her arm lifted.
Down she struck.

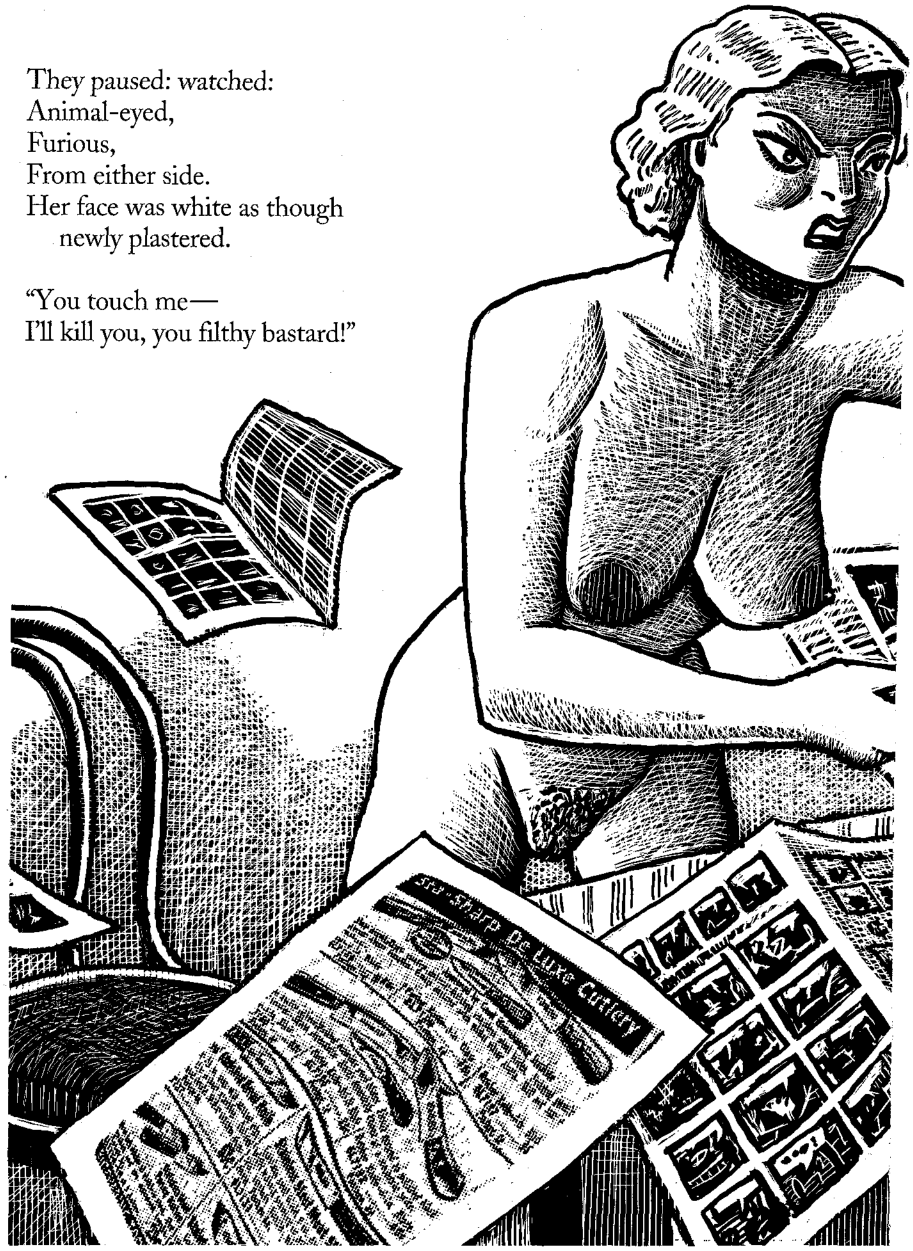
His tight embrace
Gave. His hands covered his face.
She leapt up; fled, with hard laughter.
Bleeding at the mouth,
He rushed after.

"You rotten bitch!
I'll fix you yet!"

She grabbed a knife from the
    kitchenette,
And a brown bottle with a
    whisky label:
Then dodged
Swiftly
Around the table.

They paused: watched:
Animal-eyed,
Furious,
From either side.
Her face was white as though
    newly plastered.

"You touch me—
I'll kill you, you filthy bastard!"



The threat was banal,
But her tone lent it
A quality that showed she meant it.

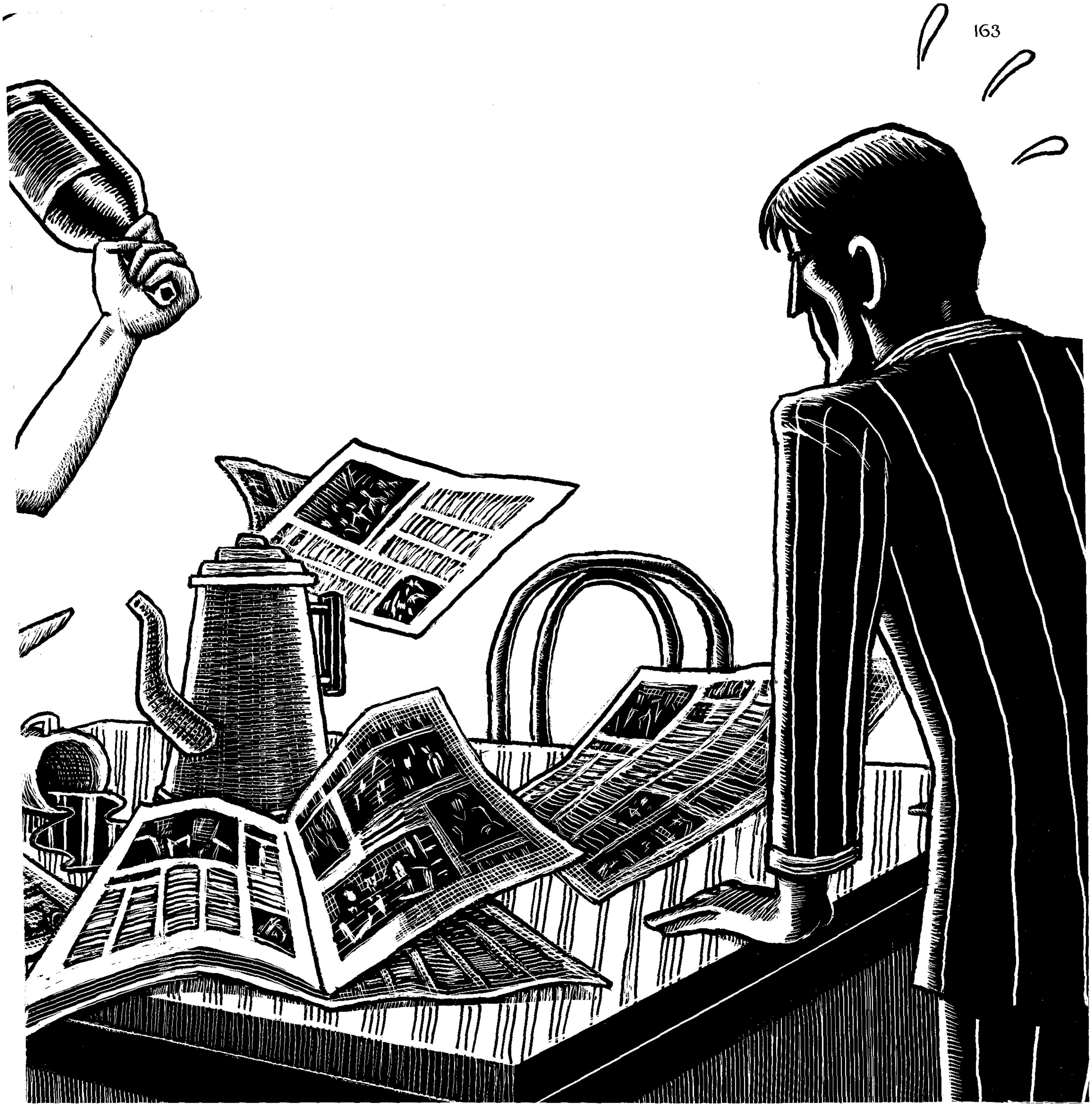
A pause.
"Well—?"
It was over.

"My sweetie's bats—
But I love her!"
Said Burrs drily.
He smiled wryly.
He was wily.
Queenie shrugged, and took the cue.

"Aw, nuts—and to hell with you!"
Was her not too sentimental retort.

"Come on," urged Burrs: "be a sport!
Go on, Cutie—drop the knife!
Let's call it quits.
I like my life!"

"Yeah?" said Queenie:
    "I wouldn't choose it.
And once for all, I'll tell you what:
The next time you call me a lazy slut,
If I find a knife, I'll damn well use it!—
Kick that idea around till you lose it!"



Having delivered herself of this,
She gave him a condescending kiss.
She took a cracked cup from the shelf:
Rattled the percolator;
Helped herself.

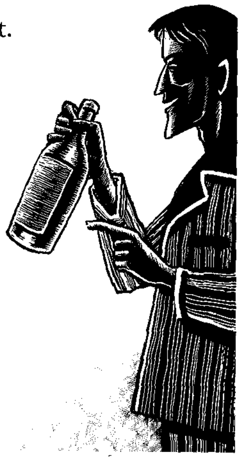
Sat,
Sipped;
Perfect lipped,
Legs crossed:

At ease: engrossed.
Beautiful.

There was a lull.
Peace.

But her face was still white,
And her eyes flickered with angry light.
At last she gave an odd
Double nod.
She raised her handsome head;
She said:
"Burrsie, I think we're about due
For a party:
Don't you?"

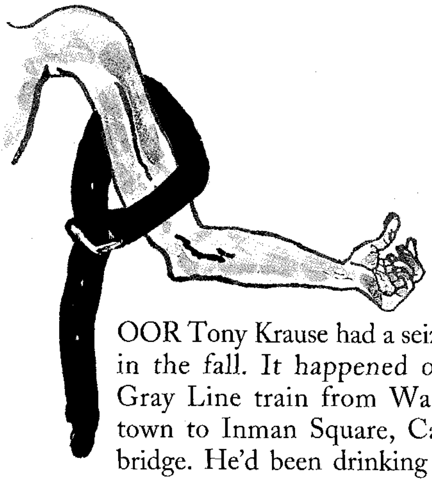
Said Burrs: "I do!
My god! I haven't been really tight
For a week!
Let's ask the gang to-night!" ♦



FICTION

SEVERAL BIRDS

BY DAVID FOSTER WALLACE



POOR Tony Krause had a seizure in the fall. It happened on a Gray Line train from Watertown to Inman Square, Cambridge. He'd been drinking codeine cough syrup in the men's room of the Armenian Foundation Library in ghastly central Watertown, MA, for over a week, darting out from cover only to beg a scrip from the hideous Equus Reese and then dash in at Brooks Pharmacy, wearing a simply vile ensemble of synthetic-fibre slacks and suspenders and tweed Donegal cap he'd had to cadge from a longshoremen's union hall. Poor Tony couldn't dare wear anything comely, not even his boa or the Antitois' red leather coat, not since that poor woman's bag had turned out to have a heart inside.[*] He had simply never felt so beset and overcome on all sides as on the black July day when it fell to his lot to boost a beating heart. Who wouldn't wonder Why me? And his Chinatown connection Mr. Wo still had him marked for ghastly harm as a consequence of that horrid delivery mixup with Susan T. Cheese last winter, since which Poor Tony hadn't dared show one boa feather east of Tremont St. all spring; and now since 29 July he was non grata at Harvard Square and environs, and even just the mere sight of an Aigner accessory gave him palpitations.

Thus Poor Tony had no way to cop for himself. He could trust no dealer enough to inject his wares. His former friend and associate Susan T. Cheese was now no more trustworthy than the hateful Wo himself; he didn't even want Susan T. Cheese to know where he was. He began drinking cough syrup. He managed to get Bridget Tenderhole and the strictly rough-trade Stokely Dark Star to cop for him on the wink for a few weeks, until Stokely D.S. died in a Fenway hospice, and then Bridget Tenderhole was shipped by his pimp to Brockton under maddeningly vague circumstances.

Then Poor Tony had read the dark portents and swallowed the first of his pride and hidden himself even more deeply in a Dumpster complex behind the I.B.P.W.D.W.[**] Local #4 Hall down in Fort Point and resolved to stay hidden there for as long as he could send his last true friend and associate Lolasister out to acquire enough heroin to chip, accepting w/o complaint the shameless rip-offs he perpetrated upon him, until October when the supply of retail heroin dried horribly up and the only people ever copping enough to chip were people in a position to dash personally here and there under an open public-access sky and no friend, no matter how dear or indebted, could afford to cop for another.

Then, wholly friend- and connectionless, plus extremely low on funds, Poo Tony, in hiding, began to Withdraw from Heroin. Not just get strung ou or sick. *Withdraw*. The various term echoed in his head with the simply most awful sinister-footsteps-echoing-in-deserted-corridor quality. Withdrawal. The Wingless Fowl. Kicking The Old Cold Bird. Poor Tony had never once had to Withdraw, not all th way down the sinister deserted corrido of Withdrawal, not since he first go strung at 17. At the very worst someon kind had always found him charming, things got dire enough to have to ren out his charms. Alas about the fact tha his charms were now at low ebb. H weighed 120 lbs. and his skin was th color of summer squash. He had terribl shivering attacks and also perspired. H had a sty that had scraped one eyeba as pink as a bunny's. His nose ran lik twin spigots and the output had a yellow-green tinge he didn't think looked promising at all. There was an uncomely dry-rot smell about him that even he could smell. In Watertown he tried to pawn his fine auburn wig w/ removable chignon and was cursed at in Armenian because the wig had infestations from his own hair below. Let's not even mention the pawnbroker's critique of his red eather coat.

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[*] —Excerpted from *Moment Weekly*, 10 August, 20—:

. . . victim, a 46-year-old Boston, Massachusetts, accountant with irreversible restenosis of the heart, responded so well to the replacement of her defective heart with a Jarvik IX Exterior Artificial Heart that within weeks she had resumed the active life style she had so enjoyed before stricken, pursuing her active schedule with the extraordinary prosthesis portably installed in an Etienne Aigner purse, where the heart's ventricular tubes ran up to shunts in the woman's arms and ferried life giving blood between her living, active body and the extraordinary heart in her purse.

. . . facts of her subsequent fate appear tragic, untimely, bizarrely [and] cruelly ironic: the . . . [woman] was actively window shopping in Cambridge, Massachusetts', fashionable Harvard Square, when a transvestite purse snatcher, a known drug addict with a criminal history well known to [police], bizarrely outfitted in a surplus cocktail dress, spike heels, and tattered feather boa, brutally tore the life sustaining purse from the woman's unwitting grasp.

The [victim] gave chase to the purse snatching "woman" for as long as she could, reportedly plaintively shouting to passers by the panicked words "Stop her! She stole my heart!" on the fashionable sidewalk crowded with shoppers. . . . [In] response to her plaintive cries, tragically, misunderstanding shoppers and passers by merely shook their heads [and] smiled knowingly at what they ignorantly presumed to be yet another alternative life style's relationship gone sour. A duo of Cambridge patrolmen were witnessed quipping, "Happens all the time," as the victimized woman staggered frantically past in the wake of the fleet transvestit shouting for help for her stolen heart.

The drug crazed purse snatcher ma have found even his hardened conscien moved by the life saving prosthesis the gotten woman's handbag revealed, whic runs on the same rechargeable power c as an electric man's razor, and may w have continued to beat and bleed for period of time in the rudely disconnecte purse.

That the prosthetic crime victim ga spirited chase *for over four blocks* b fore collapsing onto her empty chest pr vides testimony to the impressive capaci of the Jarvik IX replacement procedure. .

[**] International Brotherhood of Pi Wharf, and Dock Workers.

Poor Tony got more and more ill as he further Withdrew. His symptoms themselves developed symptoms, roughs and nodes he charted with morbid attention, in the Dumpster, in his uspenders and tweed cap, clutching his wig and coat and other comely habiliments he could neither wear nor pawn. The empty municipal Dumpster he was hiding in was new and painted pple-green and the inside was dimpled ron, and the Dumpster remained empty nd unutilized because persons declined o come near enough to utilize it. It took ome time for Poor Tony to realize why; or an interval it had seemed like a reak, fortune's one wan smile. A city anitation crew finally set him straight in anguage that left quite a bit of tact to e wished for, he felt. The Dumpster's reen iron cover also leaked when it ained, and it contained already a colony f ants along one wall, which Poor Tony ad ever since a neurasthenic childhood ared and detested in particular, ants; nd in direct sunlight the quarters beame a hellish living environment from hich even the ants seemed to vanish.

With each step further into the black orridor of actual Withdrawal, Poor Tony stamped his foot and simply reused to believe things could get or feel ny worse. Then he stopped being able o anticipate when he needed to as it ere visit the powder room. A fastidius gender-dysphoric's horror of inconnence cannot be described. Fluids of arying consistency began to pour w/o advance notice from several openngs. Then they stayed there, on the umpster's hot dimpled floor. There ey were, not going anywhere. He had o way to cop. His entire set of interersonal associations now consisted of ersons who did not care about him plus ersons who wished him harm. His late bstetrician father had rended his own othing in symbolic shiva nine years o in the kitchen of the Krause home, 412 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown. It was the incontinence that drove Poor Tony out of the Dumpster for a mad scampering relocation to an obscure Armenian Foundation Library men's room in his old home district, wherein he hung his coat and wig carefully from the hook and tried to arrange a stall as comfortingly as he could with magazine photos and cherished knickknacks, and flushed repeatedly, and sought to keep true Withdrawal at some sort of bay with bottles of Codinex Plus. A tiny percentage of codeine gets metabolized into good old C_{17} morphine, affording an agonizing hint of what real relief from The Bird might feel like. I.e., the cough syrup did little more than draw the process out, extend the corridor—slow up time.

Poor Tony Krause sat on the toilet in the domesticated stall all day and night, alternately drinking and gushing. He held his high heels up at night when the staff checked the stalls and turned off all the lights and left Poor Tony in a darkness within darkness so utter he had no idea where his own limbs were or went. He left that stall maybe once every two days, scampering madly from Equus to Brooks in cast-off shades and a kind of hood or shawl made pathetically of men's-room brown-paper towels.

Time began to take on new aspects for him now as Withdrawal progressed. Time began to pass with jagged edges. Its passage in the dark or dim-lit stall was as if time were being carried by a procession of ants, a gleaming red martial column of those militaristic red Southern ants that build hideous tall boiling hills; and each vile gleaming ant wanted a minuscule little portion of Poor Tony's flesh in compensation as it helped bear time forward down the corridor of true Withdrawal. By the second week in the stall, time itself seemed the corridor, lightless at either end. After more time time then ceased to move or be moved or be move-throughable and assumed a shape above and apart, a huge and orange-eyed wingless fowl hunched incontinent atop the stall, with a kind of watchful but deeply uncaring personality that didn't seem keen on Poor Tony Krause as a person at all, or to wish him well. Not one little bit. It spoke to him from atop the stall, the same things, over and over. They were unrepeatable. Nothing in even Poor Tony's grim life experience prepared him for the experience of time with a shape and an odor, squatting; and the worsening physical symptoms were a spree at Saks compared to time's black assurances that the symptoms were merely hints, signposts pointing up at a larger, far more dire set of Withdrawal phenomena that hung just overhead by a string that unravelled steadily with the passage of time. It would not keep still and would not end; it changed shape and smell. It moved in and out of him like the very most feared prison-shower assailant. Poor Tony had once had the hubris to fancy he'd had occasion really to shiver, ever, before. But he had never truly really shivered until time's cadences—jagged and cold and smelling oddly of deodorant—entered his body via several openings, cold the way only damp cold is cold (the phrase he'd once had the gall to imagine he understood was the phrase "chilled to the bone"), shard-studded columns of chill entering to fill his bones with ground glass, and he could hear his joints' glassy crunch with every slightest shift of his hunched position, time ambient and in the air and entering and exiting at will, very cold and slow; and the pain of his breath against his teeth. Time came to him in the falcon-black of the library night in an orange Mohawk and merry widow w/ tacky Amalfi pumps and nothing else, spread him and entered him roughly and had its way and left him again in the form of endless gushing liquid shit that he could not flush enough to keep up with. He spent the longest morbid time trying to fathom whence all the shit came from when he was ingesting nothing at all but Codinex Plus. Then at some point he realized: time had entered the shit itself, had become the shit: Poor Tony had become an hourglass: time moved through him, now; he ceased to exist apart from its flow. He now weighed more like 110 lbs. His legs were the size his comely arms had been, before Withdrawal. He was haunted by the word *Zuckung*—a foreign and possibly Yiddish word he did not recall having heard in civilian life. The word kept echoing in quick-step cadence through his head without meaning anything. He'd once naïvely assumed that going mad meant you were not aware of going mad; he'd naïvely pictured madmen as laughing. He kept seeing his sonless father again, stiffening in a bronze casket. "Chilled to the *Zuckung*."

When, then, finally, even funds for the codeine syrup were exhausted, he still sat on the toilet in the rear stall of the A.F.L. loo, surrounded by previously comforting hung habiliments, the fashion-magazine photographs he'd fastened to the wall with tape cadged on the way in from the Reference Desk, sat for almost the whole next night and day, because he had no faith that he could stem the flow of diarrhea long enough to make it anywhere—if anywhere to go presented itself—in his only pair of pants.

During hours of lit operation, the men's room was full of old men who wore identical brown loafers and spoke Slavic and whose flatulence smelled of cabbage.

Toward the end of the second medicationless afternoon, the day of the seizure, Poor Tony Krause began to Withdraw from the cough syrup's alcohol and codeine and demethylated morphine, as well as the original heroin, a set of sensations for which not even his recent experience had prepared him—the alcohol Withdrawal, especially—and when the true D.T.-type big-budget visuals commenced, when the first glossy and minutely hirsute army ant crawled up his arm and refused ghostlike to be brushed away or hammered dead, Poor Tony threw his last bit of pride into time's porcelain maw and pulled up his slacks—mortifyingly wrinkled from twelve days puddled around his ankles—made what slight cosmetic repairs he could, and donned his tacky cap with its Scotch-Taped scarf of paper towels and lit out in last-ditch desperation for Cambridge's Inman Square, for the sinister and duplicitous Antitoi brothers, their Entertainment-'N'-Notions-fronted operations center he'd long ago vowed never again to darken the door of and now figured to be his one place of very last possible resort—the Antitois, Canadians of the Quebec subgenus, sinister and duplicitous but when it came down to it rather hapless political insurgents he'd once availed of services through the offices of Lolasister, the only persons anywhere he could claim somehow owed him a kindness, since the affair of the heart. ***

On Watertown Center's underground Gray Line platform, when the first hot loose load fell out of him like something off a shelf into the baggy slacks and down his leg and out around his high heel—he still had only his red high heels with the crossing straps to wear, which the slacks were long enough to mostly hide—Poor Tony closed his eyes against the ants formicating up and down his arms' skinny length and screamed a soundless interior scream of incontinent soul-scalded woe. The beloved feather boa fit almost entirely in one breast pocket, where it stayed in the name of discretion.

On the crowded train itself, then, he discovered that he'd gone in three weeks from being a colorful and comely—albeit freakishly comely—person to being one of those loathsome urban specimens that respectable persons on T trains slide and drift quietly away from without even seeming to notice them. His shawl of paper towels had come partly untaped. He smelled of bilirubin and yellow sweat and wore eyeliner that simply did not fly if one needed a shave. There had been some negative urine incidents, as well, in the slacks. He had never in his life felt so unattractive or sick. He wept silentl in shame and pain at the passage of eac brightly lit public second's pincers, an the driver ants that boiled in his la opened needle-teethed little insectil mouths to catch the tears. He could fee his erratic pulse in his sty. The Gra Line's trains were of the trundling behemoth type, and he sat all alone a one end of the long car and felt eac slow second take its cut.

When it descended, the seizure fe less like a separate and distinct crisi than simply the next exhibit in the cor ridor of horrors that was the Old Col Bird.**** The first thing that didn't au gur very well for the lobes was a showe of spark-sized phosphenes from the ceil ing of the swaying train, plus a fiery vic let aura around the heads of th respectables who'd quietly retreated far as possible from the various puddl in which he sat. Their clean pink fac looked somehow stricken, each inside hood of violent flame. Poor Tony didn know that his silent whimpers ha ceased to be silent, was why everyone i the car had gotten so terribly intereste in the floor between their feet. He kne only that the sudden and incongruo smell of Old Spice Stick Deodoran Classic Original Scent—unbidden ar unexplainable, his late obstetrici father's brand, not smelled for years- and the tiny panicked twitters wi which the unbrushable red ants skitter glossily up into his mouth and nose ar disappeared, each of course taking i tiny pincered farewell bite as it wer heralded some new and vivider exhi on the corridor's horizon. He'd becom at puberty, violently allergic to the sm of Old Spice. As he soiled himself a

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*** The way Poor Tony Krause became in any way associated with the Antitois was that, for a heavily cut bundle to split six ways, Lolasister, Susan T. Cheese, P. T. Krause, Bridget Tenderhole, Equus Reese, and the late Stokely ("D.S.") McNair had had to wear identical red leather coats and auburn wigs and strapless heels and go and hang around the lobby of Harvard Square's Sheraton Commander Hotel with six mannish-looking women in the same wigs and coats while a strikingly androgynous Quebecer insurgent who filled out her/his red leather coat in a way that made Bridget Tenderhole dig his nails into his palms in sheer green envy came through the Commander's revolving Lucite doors and strode purposefully into the crowded Epaulet Ballroom and fired two rounds of 9-mm wadcutter into the right eye of the Canadian Minister of Trade, who was addressing the New England press from a leaf-shaped rostrum. The decoys were then required to mill hysterically in the lobby, all twelve of them, and then hit the revolving doors and disperse in a dozen different vectors as the sharpshooting Québécois crossdresser legged it out of the Epaulet Ballroom and lobby pursued by burly federal men with earplugs and Cobray M-11 subs, so the federal men'd see identical epicene figures high-heeling it away in different directions and get fuddled about whom to chase. Lolasister and Poor Tony had originally met the Antitoi Bros (only one of whom could or would speak, and who'd been in charge of the diversionary aspects of the Sheraton Commander operation, and had clearly been subordinate to s other Quebecers of way higher I.Q.)—h met them at Inman Square's Ryle's tave which had Gender-Dysphoric Night ev second Wednesday, and attracted com and unrough trade.

**** In actual fact the seizure—a kind synaptic firefight in Poor Tony's desicca temporal lobes—was caused by Withdra not from heroin but from plain old gr alcohol, which was Codinex Plus cou syrup's primary ingredient and balm. H consumed upwards of sixteen little eigh proof bottles of Codinex per day for an tended period, and so was cruising fo real neurological bruising when he just and stopped.

the plastic seat and floor once again, the Classic Scent of times past intensified. Then Poor Tony's body began to swell. He watched his limbs become airy white dirigibles and felt them deny his authority and detach from him and float sluggishly up, snout-first, into the steel-mill sparks the ceiling rained. He suddenly felt nothing, or rather Nothing, a pre-tornadic stillness of zero sensation, as if he were the very space he occupied.

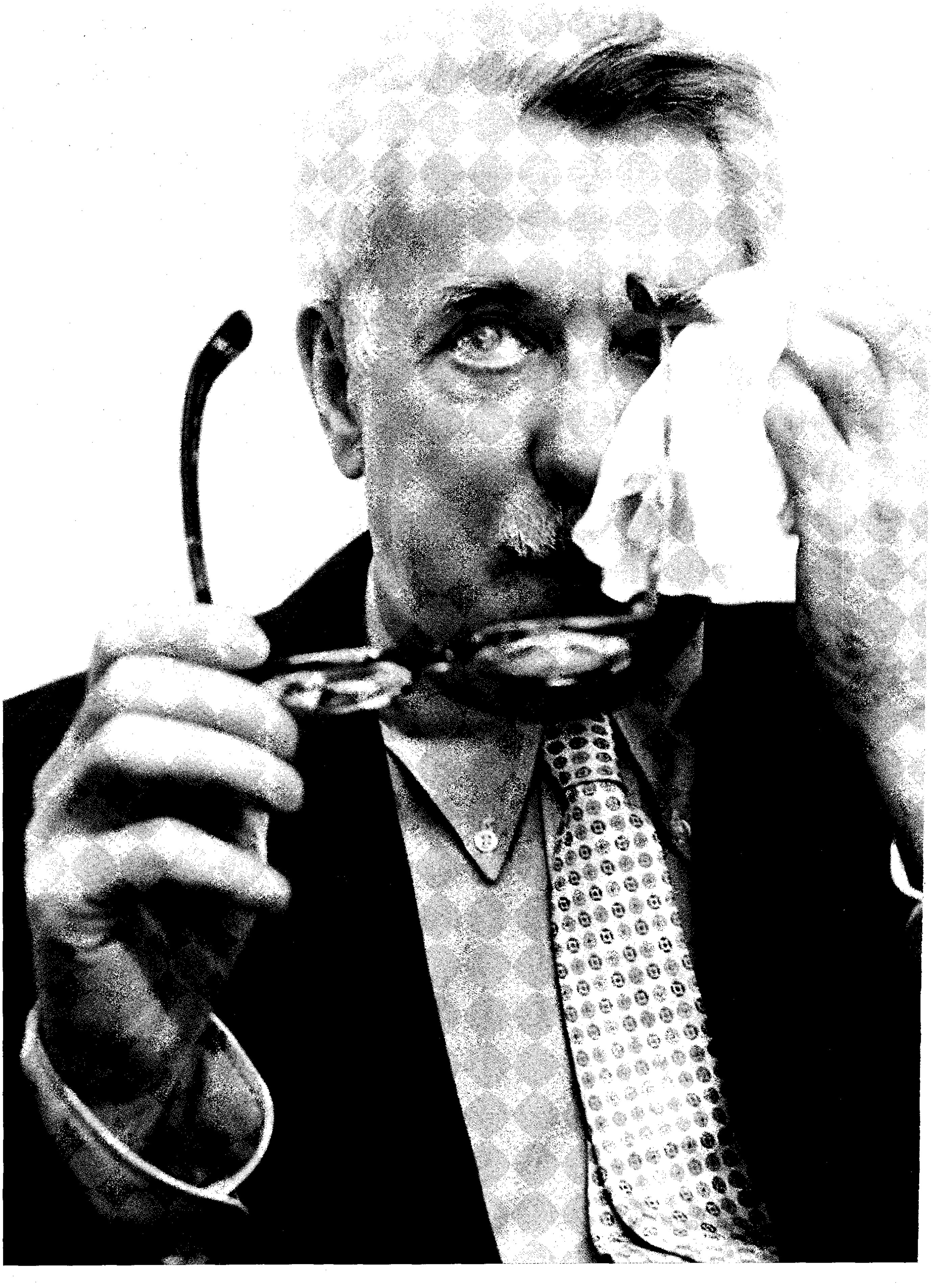
Then he had a seizure. The floor of the subway car became the ceiling of the subway car, and he was on his arched back in a waterfall of light, gagging on Old Spice and watching his tumid limbs tear-ass around the car's interior like undone balloons. The booming *Zuckung Zuckung Zuckung* was his high heels' heels drumming on the soiled floor's tile. He heard a rushing train-roar that was no train on earth and felt a vascular roar-ng rushing that until the pain hit eemed like the gathering of a kind of orgasm of the head. His head inflated and creaked as it stretched. Then the pain (seizures *hurt*, is what few civilians have occasion to know) was the sharp nd of a hammer. There was a squeak nd rush of release inside his skull and omething shot from him into the air nd hung there and sparkled. His father nelt beside him on the ceiling in a well-ended T-shirt, extolling the Red Sox of Rice and Lynn. Tony wore summer affeta. His poor body flopped around without authorization from headquarers. He didn't feel one bit like a pupet. He thought of gaffed fish. The own had a thousand flounces and a aucy bodice of crocheted lace. Then he aw his father, still green-gowned and ubber-gloved, leaning to read the headnes off the skin of a fish a newspaper ad wrapped. That had never happened. The largest-print headline said "PUSH." oor Tony flopped and gasped and ushed down inside and the utter red of he blood that feeds sight bloomed red ehind his lids. Time wasn't passing so uch as kneeling beside him in a torn -shirt disclosing the rodent-nosed tits f a man who disdains the care of his nce comely bod. Poor Tony convulsed nd drummed and gasped and fluttered, fountain of light all around him. He lt a piece of nourishing and possibly en intoxicating meat in the back of his roat but elected not to swallow it but wallowed it anyway, and was immediately sorry he'd done so; and when his father's bloody-rubbered fingers folded his teeth back to retrieve the tongue he'd swallowed he refused absolutely to bite down ungratefully on the hand that was taking his food, then without authorization he pushed and bit down and took the gloved fingers clean off, so there was rubber-wrapped meat in his chattering teeth, and his father's own head exploded like an exploding star into light between his gown's raised arms and a call for *Zuckung* while Tony's heels drummed and struggled against the widening stirrups of light they were hoisted into while a curtain of red was drawn wetly up over the floor he stared down at, Tony, and he heard someone yelling for someone to give him air with one fingerless hand on his belly as he spread and bore down to PUSH, and he saw the legs they held would spread until they cracked him open and all the way inside out on the ceiling, and his last worry was that red-handed Poppa could see up his dress, what was really there. ◆

THE WRITER'S TOWN: 1967

AND so I lived in the one room I had sublet all that summer. I can still see it. There was a couch, a grand piano, and a window that looked out onto a tree and the back of Our Lady of Pompeii School. (The first morning, I was abruptly awakened by a loudspeaker ordering me to wear my hat tomorrow, to Mass. I was confused; I didn't think I had a hat.) The couch, the piano, and I were the three largest objects in the apartment, and we felt a kinship. It was very quiet when the school term ended. I slept on the couch and set my orange-juice glasses on the grand piano. The one or two people whom I knew in New York seemed to have left for the summer. They were faculty people anyway—more James' friends than mine. The part-time job I had in a branch of the Public Library was over; they had gone on summer hours.

I see it so clearly—the window, the couch, the glass on the piano. It is as if I am still there and that endless summer is just beginning. I pour a little more gin in my orange juice. I am drinking orange juice because it has Vitamin C, and I don't like gin straight. Gin is for sleep; it is infallible. I sit on the couch facing the piano and switch the light off behind me. Through the leaves of the tree I can see the lighted back windows of Leroy Street. The dark air coming in my open window is sweet, smelling of night, garbage, and cats. Sounds hover just outside, hesitating to cross the sill. I lean to hear them, and sit in the window, placing my orange juice on the fire escape. Down through the black iron slats I can dimly make out one ... two, three neighborhood cats stalking each other, brushing through the high weeds, converging toward some lusty surprise. On the top of the piano there is a metronome. I reach over and release its armature. The pendulum swings free—*tock*-over, *tock*-over. I sit looking out across the night. *Tock* in the heavy, slow darkness. *Tock*-over. People framed in the Leroy Street windows are eating at tables, talking soundlessly, passing back and forth. Yellow light filters down in shadows, through the leaves and onto the court, darkly outlining the high wild grass, the rusted cans and gray bottles. I reach over and slide the weight all the way down. The pendulum springs away from my hand, ticking wildly, gathering velocity. Accelerando! In the dark below, the cats dance.

From "The Good Humor Man,"
by Rebecca Morris



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE GREAT DEFLATER

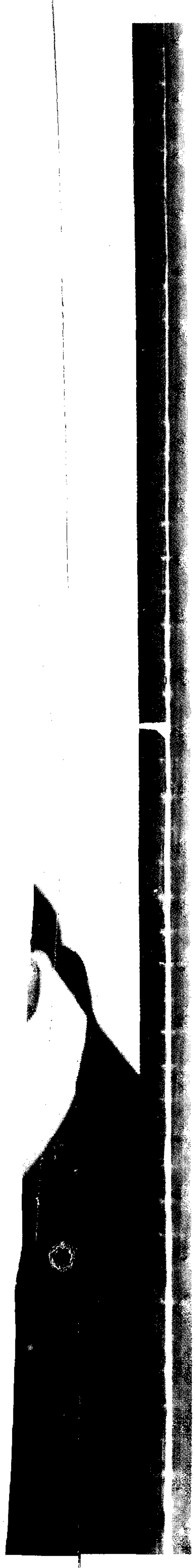
The twenties were over, but American writing was still high-flown. Then James Thurber gave it a plain, modern voice that perfectly suited the American comedy.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

THURBER was the first writer I ever loved—literally loved to pieces, reading and rereading the family copy of "The Thurber Carnival" until its back broke and the cover (a frightened man chased by a determined woman round and round on a carrousel) came off in my hands, and I had to take the loose pages to bed. This infatuation may have been extreme, but it wasn't unique. Reading Thurber got a lot of people started. Wilfrid Sheed and John Updike, to name only two, both recall Thurber as the writer who got them going, too—made them think for the first time that what they wanted to do was write. In retrospect, it's hard to figure out what there was in Thurber that made you want to do what he did, since, unlike Salinger or Hemingway, those other great American scoutmasters of cub writers, he didn't offer a self-confident set of values, or the picture of a particularly glamorous life. What he offered was a *tone*—crusty bemusement eventually resolving itself into a kind of wistful poetic insight. That was enough. If you could hit that note, it seemed, you could charm your way around any obstacle life threw up. It sounded like the voice of sanity, because it took failure as a given and confusion as an absolute.

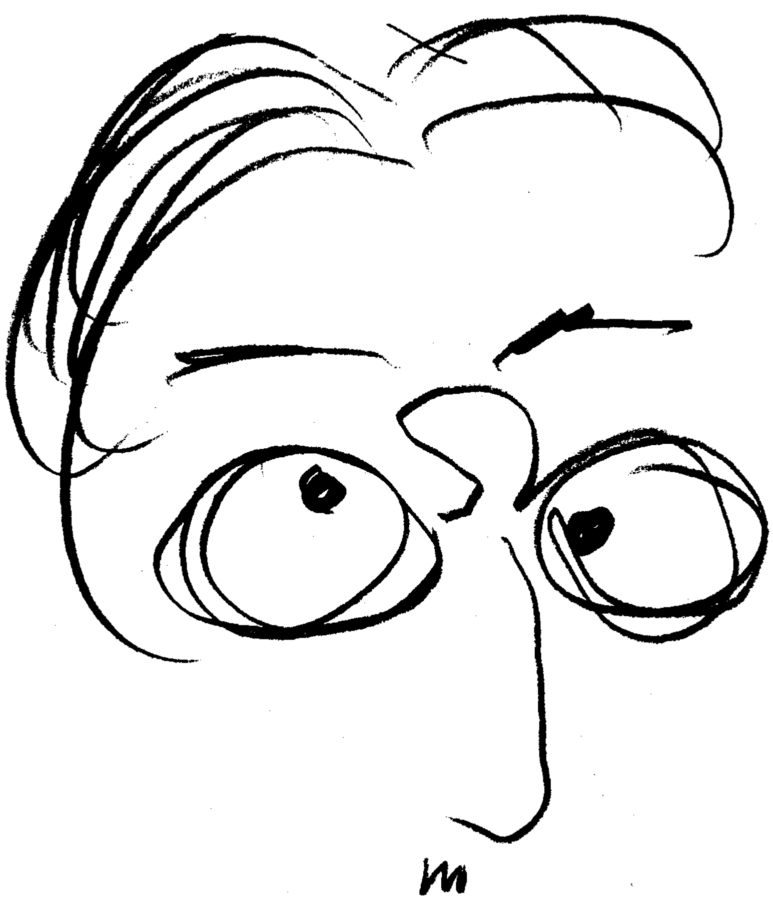
For a while, particularly in the thirties and forties, that tone charmed the country, even the world. The knowing, hatchet-faced Thurber wife; the timid, daydreaming Thurber husband; the mournful, stoical Thurber dog—in the middle of the century, they immediately summoned up a whole view of life. The tone wasn't seductive just to the young, or to what used to be called a "mass audience," either. For a long time, among the highbrows, Thurber was the only funny man who counted. Auden was crazy about him, putting him into "New Year Letter" as one of his modern masters, and suggesting, after Thurber's "Famous Poems Illustrated" came out, that a good rule for detecting unintentionally comic lines in poetry was to imagine how they would look if Thurber drew them. (It's still a good rule. Take, say, Sylvia Plath's "By the roots of my hair some god got hold of me. / I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet." See that in Thurber's hand, and the whole thing falls to pieces.) In 1933, Hemingway said that Thurber's "My Life and Hard Times" was the best writing coming out of America—shrewdly leaving a loophole for some other writing to be the best writing coming *into* America. It was once reported—with what accuracy it's hard to say—that Matisse said that Thurber was the most interesting draftsman in America. By the time Thurber was the subject of a *Time* cover, in 1951, it was pretty much taken for granted that, as he himself liked to say, he was the greatest American humorist since Mark Twain.

But now, in this year of the centenary of his birth, his work is dead, or dying. Thurber's reputation, to borrow a metaphor from Thurber, has not so much crumbled away as just been turned off. The game of "Nobody any longer reads . . ." is a perilously easy one to play these days, since it often seems that nobody reads *anything*. But it is certainly true that Thurber is no longer quite the bit of Americana that he once was. Twenty years ago, Thurber's stuff could still be the basis of a television sitcom ("My World and Welcome to It") and



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

New York City, December 10, 1958.



© BY HELEN W. THURBER, © 1966, 1994 ROSEMARY THURBER FROM "THURBER & COMPANY"

a Jack Lemmon movie ("The War Between Men and Women")—both pretty bad, but still trying to profit from the connection. Now it sometimes seems that Thurber's tone lingers on only in the relentless and processed curmudgeonliness of Andy Rooney's bits on "60 Minutes."

This decline was caused in part by the passage of time—a dismaying number of Thurber pieces depend on funny things said by colored servants, immigrant workingmen, etc.—and was accelerated by what Sheed has called Burton Bernstein's "coroner's report of a biography." Thurber's popular reputation was as a lovable curmudgeon, and in the real world (look at Philip Larkin) there is no such thing as a lovable curmudgeon. Anyone who is inspired to put his misery into writing is truly miserable, worse than it shows. Writing gives the illusion of a man in control, having chosen a particular kind of misery as a subject; in fact, the misery has almost always chosen him. Bernstein's biography showed that Thurber was a completely unhappy man, who devoted himself to making people around him as unhappy as he was, and mostly succeeded. Even his literary success didn't help, since the more attention he got as a humorist the more bitter he became about getting attention only as a humorist.

This is the life cycle of every funny writer this side of P. G. Wodehouse, of course, and you wouldn't think that people would be surprised by the news, or let it alter their opinion of the writer, but they did. Still, the transformation of Thurber's reputation suggests the possibility of a new way of getting Thurber—as an American classic rather than as an American myth. Reread today, Thurber seems much less expansive than one had hoped, much more limited, and much less charming. But he is still, at his best—in three books he published between 1933 and 1942, "My Life and Hard Times," "Let Your Mind Alone!," and "My World—And Welcome to It"—a great and moving writer, a kind of American Larkin in prose: a light stylist of the heavy heart.

Thurber had on the surface a relatively uneventful life, but as you peer into the details of his biography it becomes oddly apparent that his career as a humorist neatly tracked the great catastrophes of American life. He was shaped as a boy by the Civil War, was made as a writer by the Great War and the Depression, and was pretty much finished off as a writer by the Second World War. James Thurber was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1894. He was Ohio down to the roots. His great-grandfather had been born there during the Jefferson Administration. Thurber's father was a minor Republican-machine functionary whose real vocation in life lay in entering newspaper puzzle competitions. (When the son was middle-aged and sat down to write about him, the most vivid thing he could recall about the old man was that he had been cheated out of the prize in a think-up-the-caption competition in 1905.) In a famous piece comparing his own childhood with that of Salvador Dali, Thurber wrote, "The adults around me when I was in short pants were neither so glamorous nor so attentive" as Dali's in Catalonia. "They consisted mainly of eleven maternal great-aunts, all Methodists, who were staunch believers in physic, mustard plasters, and Scripture, and it was part of their dogma that artistic tendencies should be treated in the same way as hiccups or hysteria."

Only the obsessive cult of the Civil War suggested that anything had ever really happened in these prosperous but parched lives. In Thurber's stories, his grandfather is still waking up in the middle of the night reliving the retreat from Fredericksburg. The familiar names recur like bells throughout Thurber's work, gravely anchoring it in a more heroic era: Shiloh, Gettysburg, the Army of the Potomac, Forrest's cavalry. In his cartoon epic "The War between Men and Women," the war that men and women fight is a hallucinatory version of the War Between the States: infantry about to spring from behind dry-stone walls, and pitched battles fought hand to hand, culminating in a grand his-and-hers Gettysburg.

The cult of the war pervaded Thurber's childhood and gave him what every comic writer needs—a space to survey, a discrepancy in the world which he has noticed and no one else has. He had, early on, an acute sense of the smallness of the people he knew compared with their epic account of their own history. Back just around the corner, in his grandfather's time, a bloody and heroic battle was fought for a great cause, and the inheritors of this victory were the mean-spirited and resolutely unheroic members of his own family.

THURBER'S sense of frustration at the smallness of his circumstances and the limits of his family's imagination was increased by an accident: a comic, cartoon version of the artist's wound.

One of his brothers, playing Indians, fired an arrow into Thurber's right eye, and, with a dulled indifference that could still drive him crazy forty years later, his family left the eye alone for more than a week to "heal." The eye became infected, and, as Thurber later learned, and as any ophthalmologist might have predicted, it eventually caused the other eye to develop sympathetic ophthalmia. He could just barely see at the best of times—when he didn't have his glasses on, the world was a vivid, suggestive blur—and must have sensed that sooner or later he would go blind.

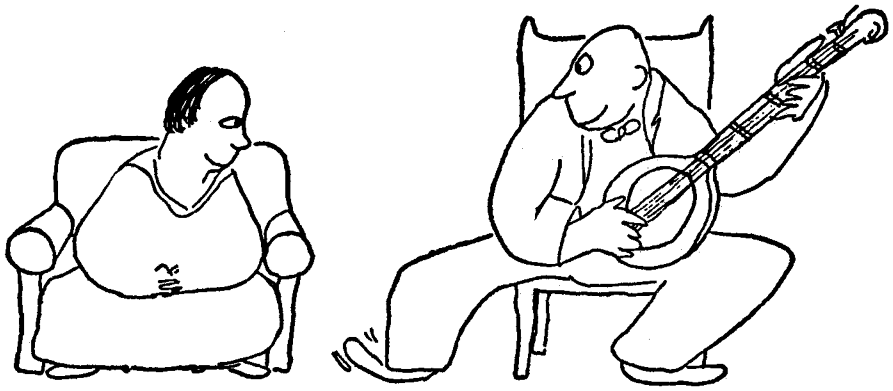
He wanted to become a newspaperman; he studied English at Ohio State University and later got a job on the local paper. He learned the "chastened," direct American style from the kind of tough city editor who plays the role—scaring you to death, and emerging in memory, long after, as lovable—that schoolmasters play in English writing. The other great influence on him was Robert O. Ryder, the light-editorial writer on a competing paper, a "paragrapher" whose rhythms—"A hardened reformer never seems able to make up his mind which is the most beautiful word in the language, 'compulsory' or 'forbidden' "—Thurber imitated for the rest of his life. He picked up the plain American style at its source—from the city desk and the cracker-barrel philosopher. What this tone needed was a subject, and a less provincial horizon.

Thurber got the subject only years later, in New York, but he got the richer landscape in France. He went there for the first time in 1918, as a code clerk in the American Embassy, and loved it so much that in 1925, after he married a Columbus girl named Althea Adams, he worked his way back, to become a rewrite man on the Paris edition of the Chicago *Tribune*. He loved Paris—"France, whenever I was there, made my heart a lighted place," he wrote years later—and probably got more out of France and French culture than any other American writer. A. J. Liebling understood France so well that he was himself practically a French writer; he knew it too well to learn much from it. Hemingway learned, among other things, the *Travel & Leisure* snobbishness that still disfigures some of his books. ("Pernod is greenish imitation absinthe.") But Thurber, though he could hardly speak French (or maybe for just that reason: it kept him at a wondering distance), drank in what French culture offered a boy from Ohio, a completely ceremonial set of manners to set off against the Midwestern smallness that was all he had known before. The elaborate punctiliousness of the French looked to Thurber like civilization itself. Years later, when he went back to France, he could still write long, awestruck letters home, just describing the complications in getting a glass of iced orange juice to take from the Café de Flore back to Helen, his second wife, down with a cold in the hotel. Liebling was eventually able to recognize that the elaborate punctiliousness of French manners was the companion of French passivity; it was a more complicated realization, and when it came to him—no one who was in Paris at the surrender could miss it—it transformed his writing. Thurber just saw French manners as an alternative to Ohio life, and they remained for him part of what he called, in 1942, "the color and pattern of the surface which is to me the loveliest in the world."

His exposure to French culture, with its religion of art and the artist, gave him the ambition to become a belletrist rather than a rewrite man. When he came back to America, in 1926, he moved to New York with Althea—who became, through no fault of her own, the model for the Thurber wife—and started writing. Henry James, the expatriate's Homer, was his favorite author, but Thurber set himself to work as a metropolitan humorist, in the bright, tirelessly sprightly manner of Benchley and F.P.A. He wasn't much good at it, and he wrote for a while without much success, or even much encouragement. (Harold Ross wanted to make him into an editor.) Thurber was the not uncommon kind of writer who doesn't get really good until he is nearly middle-aged. He was thirty-six before he wrote anything first-rate. The hurt feelings of the late-arriving writer and his permanent sense of grievance at the unfairness of things may account a little for Thurber's later braggadocio and neediness.

In 1927, though, Thurber began selling pieces to the fledgling *New Yorker*—one of them was a roundabout parody of tabloid murder reporting which, to borrow a line from "Pickwick," makes you envy the ease with which our grandparents were entertained—and he and E. B. White eventually got closeted in a little office on Forty-fifth Street: Addison and Steele in a broom closet. The two wrote what was then a famous book, "Is Sex Necessary?"—the title suggests how and why the book has dated—and helped create the tone of this magazine. It is often said, with justice, that White taught Thurber to write, and it's certainly true that there's not a sentence in Thurber, pre-White, that sounds like Thurber. Both men, though, were drawing on the common reservoir of the provincial American newspaper style, which was in healthy shape in those days, already slimmed down and seeking to make its points lightly and slyly. Everybody was going for plainness in those early Depression years, in contrast to the exhausting fanciness of twenties writing. Joseph Mitchell got there on his own over at the *World-Telegram*.

What was new in Thurber and White's *New Yorker* writing was that they put that chastened style to work in a cosmopolitan setting. They combined a pared-down style with the bounce of Benchley. The form of the deadpan sentence was familiar; it was just that nobody had written one before about New



© BY HELEN W. THURBER, © 1966, 1994 ROSEMARY THURBER FROM "THURBER & COMPANY"

York, and done it gaily. White did this better than anybody else, but what really set him apart—particularly from his officemate—wasn't that he wrote simply but that he thought straight. Thurber got from White not just a simplified style but a consistent set of principles—places to put the emotional pluses and minuses. Thurber had a set of grievances and yearnings; White had a crisp system of values: the country over the city; the hand-rigged over the well-engineered; the tentative stab over the self-assured gesture. The ideal position was to be an outsider to the city, just here for the week, sitting on the edge of one's seat before swinging off to Maine, or at least Connecticut. He invented a new kind of urbanity, which depended on acting a little like an innocent.

White's ideals and principles, as they developed, were resilient and far-reaching—anyone who doubts that should reread the remarkably tough-minded and fatalistic "Charlotte's Web." But what must have made him so impressive to Thurber was that White actually *believed* the things he professed—eventually he actually went to Maine and raised chickens, instead of just talking about it. White was an apprehensive man, but he was secure in his faiths. When it seemed necessary, he even left *The New Yorker*, for a while. (Thurber never got any farther away than Connecticut, and then kept coming back to town, to rage at the editors and get drunk at Costello's.)

What was strategy for White was just tactics for Thurber. Once he saw that you could get farther in the city by acting like the Columbus boy you had been all along, his competitive instincts kicked in: nobody was going to out-little-guy *him*, by God. He took over White's shyness and his values and made them into a storytelling structure: the little man overwhelmed by life in New York. But White's certainties helped tame Thurber's egotism and got him to see the literary value of modesty. That set Thurber free to look hard at his own inner life without becoming, as he had been before and would be later, a bore on the page.

The one thing he had all over White—and everybody else, for that matter—was his faith in the significance of the details of his own inner experience, and in his access to those details. He had a pool of unconscious misery so large that it lay right under his skin; all he had to do was open a vein. "His waking dreams and his sleeping dreams commingled shamelessly and uproariously," White wrote admiringly of Thurber. Thurber didn't have much of a gift for description or for thinking up plots; his gift was for looking inside and saying honestly what he saw. What came out was a perfect record of the faint, tuneless music of the mind. This music, more than the famous little-man attitude, is what is startling and still fresh in Thurber. There are very few jokes or setups in the pieces, and almost no *movement*. What there is instead is an uncanny flow of accurate psychological representation, as convincing in its way as Virginia Woolf's, though pitched in a comic rather than an ecstatic tone. "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is, of course, the most famous example of his gift for setting down the modern apprehension of the world as it really is, the timid suburban male slipping in and out of a vivid fantasy life. But that famous story is, if anything, slightly overcontrolled. Even more wonderful are the little bits and pieces of remembered consciousness that he could spin into entire pieces:

> I had been trying all afternoon, in vain, to think of the name Perth Amboy. It seems now like a very simple name to recall and yet on the day in question I thought of every other town in the country, as well as such words and names and phrases as terra cotta, Walla-Walla, bill of lading, vice versa, hoity-toity, Pall Mall, Bodley Head, Schumann-Heink, etc. without even coming close to Perth Amboy. I suppose terra cotta was the closest I came, although it was not very close.
>
> Long after I had gone to bed, I was struggling with the problem. I began to indulge in the wildest fancies as I lay there in the dark, such as that there was no such town, and even that there was no such state as New Jersey. I fell to repeating the word "Jersey" over and over again, until it became idiotic and meaningless. If you have ever lain awake at night and repeated one word over and over, thousands and millions and hundreds of thousands of millions of times, you know the disturbing mental state you can get into. . . . I got out of bed, walked into the room where father was sleeping, and shook him. "Um!" he mumbled. I shook him more fiercely and he finally woke up, with a glaze of dream and apprehension in his eyes. "What's matter?" he asked, thickly. I must, indeed, have been rather wild of eye, and my hair, which is unruly, becomes monstrously tousled and snarled at night.

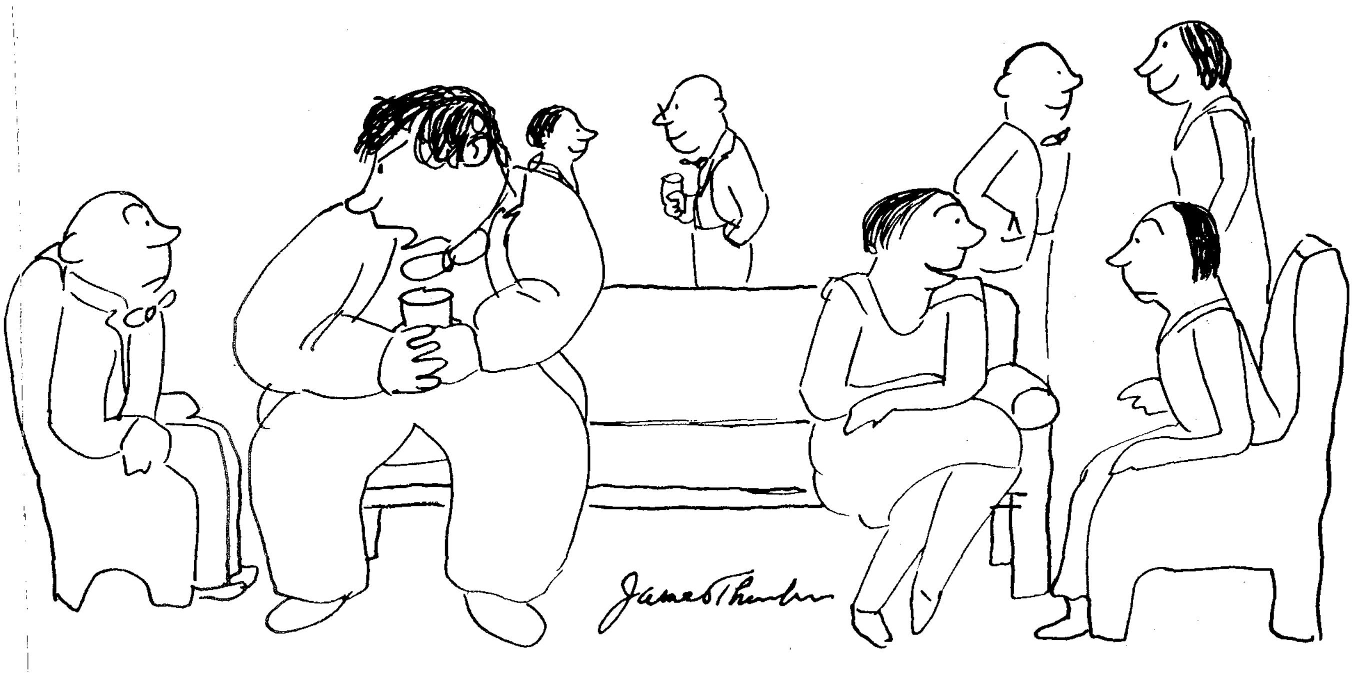
FROM THE NEW YORKER, DECEMBER 10, 1938

He could put this kind of mental record up on its feet, too. In his best work, he dramatized the collision of two or three internal monologues, coexisting alongside each other without ever quite arriving at an understanding: two streams of consciousness arising out of a pair of mixed-up people, like two low-pressure fronts, and causing a storm. In "A Ride with Olympy," for instance, the narrator tries to show the White Russian handyman who "came with" his rented house on Cap d'Antibes how to drive a Ford; neither one speaks fluent French, and they enter into the negotiation like two cautious men entering a bordello:

> He put his foot on the clutch, tentatively, and said "*Embrayage*?" He had me there. My knowledge of French automotive terms is inadequate and volatile. I was forced to say I didn't know. I couldn't remember the word for clutch in any of the three languages, French, Italian and German, in which it was given in my "Motorist's Guide" (which was back at the villa). Somehow *embrayage* didn't sound right for clutch (it is, though). I knew it wouldn't do any good for an American writer to explain in French to a Russian boat specialist the purpose that particular pedal served; furthermore, I didn't really know. I compromised by putting my left foot on the brake. "*Frein*," I said. "*Ah*," said Olympy, unhappily. This method of indicating what something might be by demonstrating what it wasn't had a disturbing effect. I shifted my foot to the accelerator—or rather pointed my toe at it—and suddenly the word for that, even the French for gasoline, left me. I was growing a little nervous myself. "*Benzina*," I said, in Italian finally. "*Ah*?" said Olympy. Whereas we had been one remove from reality to begin with, we were now two, or perhaps three, removes. . . . I suppose we should have given up right then, but we didn't.

It's a conventional "humorous" occasion, or situation: the baffled Russian, the confusions about language. But how magical that parenthetical "it is, though" seemed to me when I first read it, as a kid. So did his quantification of the removes from reality—the hint that you could, if you tried hard, enumerate them. The kind of mental scruple and mysterious, timid reverence for the intertwining of language and reality that shines through the passage—a kind of stabbing, pained nervous apprehension—would have been beyond Benchley, or even Ring Lardner. Thurber had the gift of inner attentiveness, made all the lovelier for being devoted to such seemingly flimsy or unrewarding material: the name of a town in Jersey, the French word for "clutch."

The main accomplishment of Thurber and White in their early work was to turn down the volume, and end the hysteria, of American humorous writing and



"He looks a little like Thomas Wolfe, and he certainly makes the most of it."

FROM THE NEW YORKER, NOVEMBER 23, 1935

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satire. They managed—and the achievement really is comparable to that of Addison and Steele—to find for American prose a mixed, middle style and, in so doing, to deprovincialize it. Thurber and White took the manner of the small-town editorialist and, by applying it to big-town events, made it sound cosmopolitan. Even Mencken and Lardner, whose tuning fork set the comic pitch of the twenties, read like nineteenth-century writers by comparison. There is a fancy, complicated, exhausting self-consciousness about Mencken's writing, struggling to show that *he's* no rube; it's full of German tags and fancy Latin phrases, which are a sure sign of provincialism. And Lardner, though his writing could be plain, still worked for his effects, within the well-wrought cornpone tradition of the *Saturday Evening Post:* a point is looked for at the end of every story—a twist, a turn, a surprise. Lardner still clings tight to the Artemus Ward dialect and the O. Henry ending.

Thurber, even more than White, is, by contrast, a fully twentieth-century writer. The Thurber sentence is *modern*—modern in its lack of self-congratulatory verve, its deliberate emptiness of affect ("I don't know. I don't think about it much anymore" is a typical Thurber ending; Benchley or Mencken would no more have been able to write that than to write "The Waste Land"), its emptying out of "high spirits" and "zaniness" and all the other exhausting effects of the Professional Entertainer. He got the arched eyebrows and the waggish smiles out of American sentences, and in doing so he made them cosmopolitan. Jacques Rivière said once that what would make writing modern would be the suspension of any distance between the writer and his subject, so that adherence to the particular essence of whatever was being written about would become all that writing was. Thurber wrote that way without thinking about it—there isn't a point or a maxim, or even a "vision," anywhere in his best work.

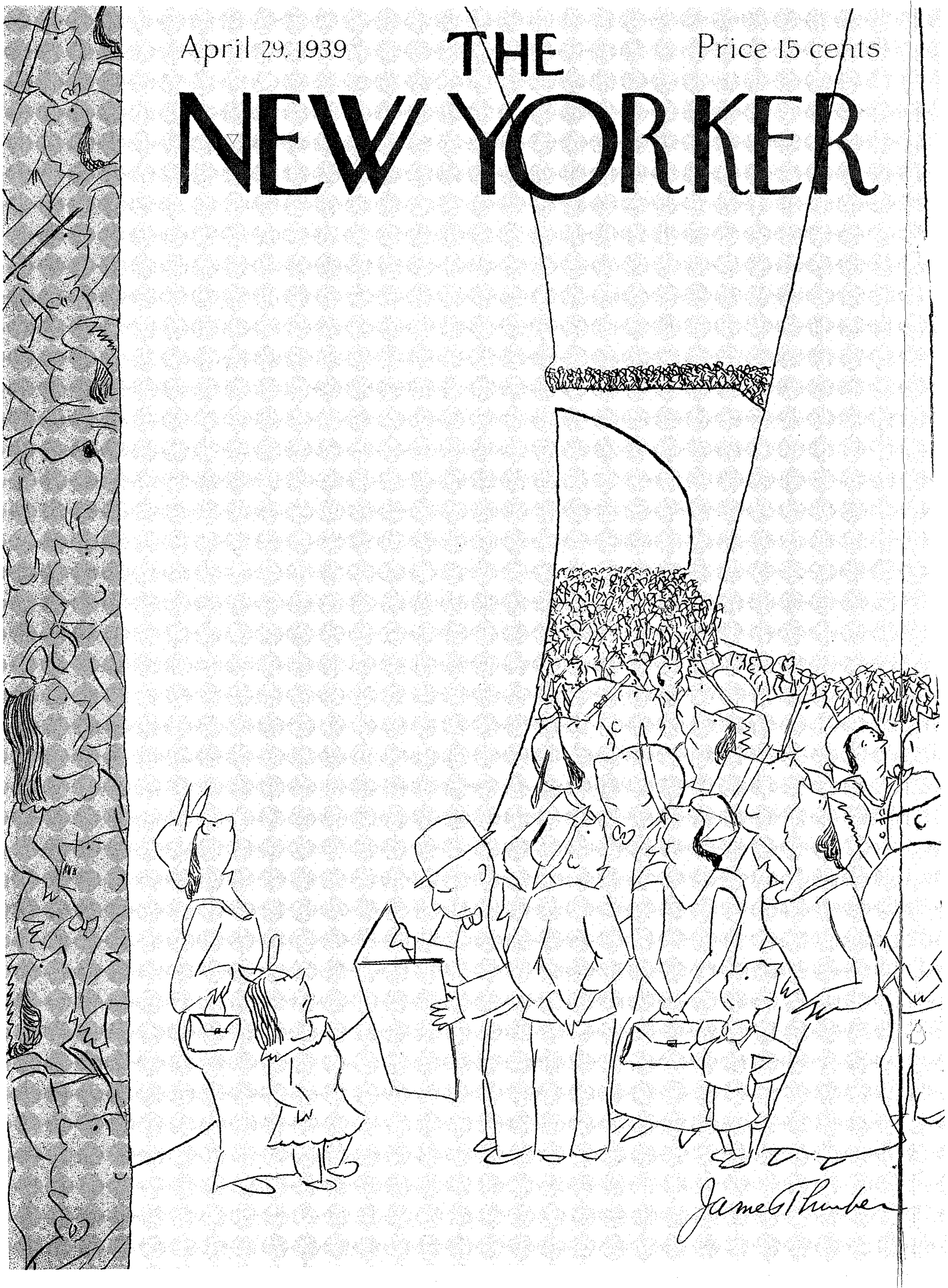
He knew it, too, and saw that the local intensity of his craft was also a sign of its large-scale limitations. "We are trapped in consciousness, trapped by mortality, trapped inside an inadequate animal body, trapped within the poor limitations of the human spirit," he wrote once. "Some of us (this is what I have been leading up to) also happen to be caught in smaller prisons within the larger ones, like a mouse in a trap in Sing Sing. This type of badgered human being is given to the short, nervous essay rather than to the 972-page novel or autobiography." This is a classic Thurber passage—the genuine cry of pain, the funny apologetic parenthesis, the perfect image of the twice-trapped mouse, and the self-knowledge about why this kind of talent can't produce anything bigger, or want to. He was funny because he had a sense of proportion about how much he could do with his own misery.

In 1933, he pulled everything together and wrote his masterpiece, "My Life and Hard Times," which is still in print and probably always will be. On the surface, it is simply a series of anecdotes (worn smooth by repetition, one imagines) about his youth in Columbus, built on the hardy Clarence Day "Life with Father" model. But although "My Life and Hard Times" takes place within a nineteenth-century ambience (the book ends with the 1918 Armistice), its sensibility belongs to the thirties—the Age of Anxiety looking back on the Age of Innocence, not nostalgically but with recrimination. Everything began to get mixed up way back there in Columbus. Each chapter describes a small event from Thurber's youth: "The Night the Bed Fell," "The Car We Had to Push," "The Day the Dam Broke" (it didn't), "The Dog That Bit People." The Thurber people in "My Life and Hard Times" are fully contemporary—already nervous wrecks back in the Booth Tarkington nineties. Thurber's grandmother "lived the latter years of her life in the horrible suspicion that electricity

April 29, 1939

THE NEW YORKER

Price 15 cents


James Thurber

was dripping invisibly all over the house." He goes on:

> It leaked, she contended, out of empty sockets if the wall switch had been left on. She would go around screwing in bulbs, and if they lighted up she would hastily and fearfully turn off the wall switch and go back to her *Pearson's* or *Everybody's*, happy in the satisfaction that she had stopped not only a costly but a dangerous leakage. Nothing could ever clear this up for her.

His cousin Briggs Beall, the key actor in "The Night the Bed Fell," believed that he was likely to cease breathing when he was asleep.

> It was his feeling that if he were not awakened every hour during the night, he might die of suffocation. . . . He slept in my room and I told him that I was such a light sleeper that if anybody quit breathing in the same room with me, I would wake instantly. He tested me the first night—which I had suspected he would—by holding his breath after my regular breathing had convinced him I was asleep. I was not asleep, however, and called to him. This seemed to allay his fears a little, but he took the precaution of putting a glass of spirits of camphor on a little table at the head of his bed. In case I didn't arouse him until he was almost gone, he said, he would sniff the camphor, a powerful reviver. Briggs was not the only member of his family who had his crotchets. Old Aunt Melissa Beall . . . suffered under the premonition that she was destined to die on South High Street, because she had been born on South High Street and married on South High Street. Then there was Aunt Sarah Shoaf, who never went to bed at night without the fear that a burglar was going to get in and blow chloroform under her door through a tube. To avert this calamity—for she was in greater dread of anesthetics than of losing her household goods—she always piled her money, silverware, and other valuables in a neat stack just outside her bedroom, with a note reading: "This is all I have. Please take it and do not use your chloroform, as this is all I have."

This is the Western Reserve of Kafka country, a world of premonitions and stretched nerves and—there is no other phrase for it—constant existential dread. The point, of course, is that Thurber's people are funny to us exactly because their dread is out of proportion to their essential security. But *they* don't know that. He worked with material that he knew always touched the outer edge of craziness.

In its picture of small-city life, "My Life and Hard Times" is the most self-consciously Twain-like of all Thurber's books—a kind of updated Tom Sawyer—but its manner isn't Twain's by a mile. In this book, more than in any other, Thurber managed to find the first complete, full-bodied literary style in American funny writing since Twain invented his; it was the book in which he fully developed the new way of seeing the world which the style he and White invented had always implied. Everything in Twain, and in the American humor that descends from him, grows out of the tall tales with which Twain's literary career began. For all the leisureliness that the spaciousness of Twain's control suggests—confident writing always suggests spaciousness—in Twain wild things happen wildly. Even "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is a novel of extreme and improbable action: Pap drowns, Jim flees, and the Duke and the King are ridden out of town on a rail. (Twain's less controlled books, "The Innocents Abroad" and "Roughing It," are so crammed with incident as to be nearly unreadable now.) That kind of eventfulness remained the model of American humor for the next half century.

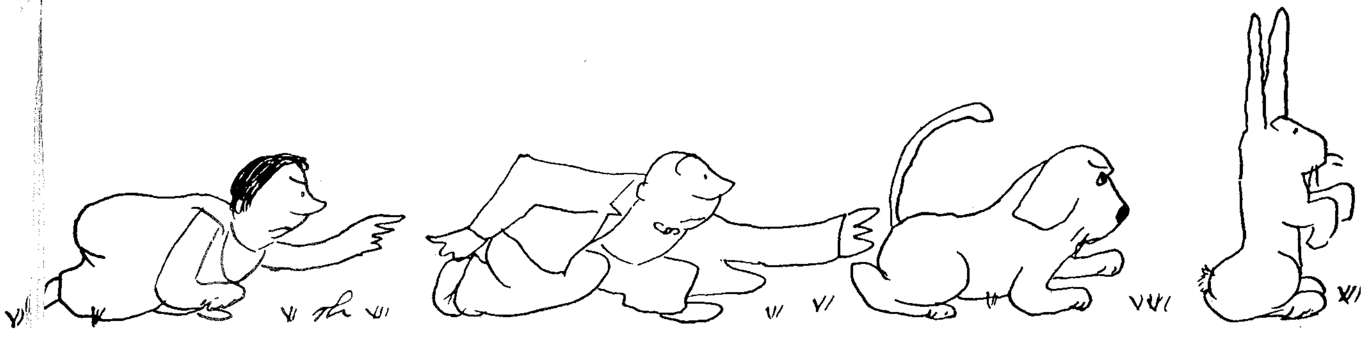
THURBER was the Great Deflater of the American comic sentence. The point of Thurber's stories is that nothing has really happened: there is no ghost, the bed has not really fallen, the alarms at night are just an expression of the permanent nerves of the sleepless. The American tall tales, rooted in a cheerful overestimation of the possibilities of life, settle *inside* Thurber's people and become manias and hallucinations, or else they just sit and fester and occasionally erupt. After Thurber, the conventional tone of American humor became the understated rather than the overwrought.

"My Life and Hard Times" was also illustrated throughout in Thurber's grownup style, if that word can be applied. Thurber, by the end of his life, was annoyed if people praised his drawings at the expense of, or even in addition to, his writing, since the writing was all work and the drawings just happened. The story about Matisse admiring Thurber was most likely just a polite lie, or exaggeration, but Thurber's drawings are genuinely Matissean, in the sense that they depend on a simple, animated line to express something about the enclosure of modern life. It is a yearning, anxious line. Auden thought that Thurber had found the right form for man in the Age of Anxiety—emptied out, supple, ready to be filled by whatever bad wind blows. Auden wrote, in "New Year Letter":

> All in their morning mirrors face
> A member of a governed race:
> Each recognizes what *Lear* saw,
> And he and *Thurber* liked to draw,
> The neuter outline that's the plan
> And icon of Industrial Man,
> The Unpolitical afraid
> Of all that has to be obeyed.

That neutered outline was a line of pure nerve. Thurber's most moving drawings occur not when he is illustrating something but when he is just drawing. His drawings were, as White recalled, mostly a series of hieroglyphs, compulsive doodles, and one can identify a few in the books: the grown man, his head collapsed into his arms, sleeping at a schoolboy's desk; the faceless man slumped on a park bench; the staring dogs.

But it is a mistake to see Thurber narrowly as a romantic. The jokes weren't just funny hats that he put on his nightmares; they were his gift, and his saving grace. His sense of humor was identical with his sense of proportion. The cap-



FROM THE NEW YORKER, APRIL 20, 1935

tions of Thurber's cartoons are as funny as his drawing is sad, because he captures the conceits and edgy hopefulness of his unhappy era as much as its pressures: "Well, I'm disenchanted, too. We're *all* disenchanted" and "What do you want to be inscrutable *for*, Marcia?" Two of his most famous cartoons—"What have you done with Dr. Millmoss?" and "Touché!" (the satisfied cry of the man who has sliced off the head of his fencing opponent)—are funny because they find a suggestion of normality in an impossible situation, which is what modern living demands. There must be *something* to say. "I can't go on, I'll go on." And they do.

Humorous writing always produces, by its own internal momentum, a complementary unhumorous emotion. The frenetic activity in Twain, for instance, is paired with a kind of passive, floating stillness, the beautiful stasis of the Mississippi; the condescensions of Lardner are paralleled by a sardonic anger. The emotion that Thurber's concentration on the pure details of inner experience produces is just sadness, and this gives it class. Melancholy always seems like a nobler emotion than bitterness, since melancholy moves inside the writer, while bitterness lashes out at his world. In the thirties, Thurber wrote two still terrifically moving pieces—"One Is a Wanderer" and "The Evening's at Seven"—that tap straight into the melancholy, without even a feint at comedy. Both are stream-of-urban-consciousness: a thinly disguised Thurber, desperately lonely and depressed, wandering around New York—in and out of the office, visiting an old girlfriend (or wife?), taking taxicabs, staring at newsstands, drinking too much. Both pieces work in a way that most funny writers' serious stuff never does, because the sadness isn't self-conscious, appliquéd on. The sadness was right there, commingled all along, as White saw, with the funny stuff. Those two stories are touching in their depth of feeling, and touching, too, in their ironic knowledge of who the author was; Thurber was short on many things, but, at his best, he wasn't short on self-knowledge. (Having it isn't the same thing as being able to act on it, as every veteran of psychotherapy knows.) He writes in "One Is a Wanderer":

> She doesn't know how I start my days, he thought, she only knows how I end them. She doesn't even know how I started my life. She only knows me when night gets me. If I could only be the person she wants me to be, why, then I would be fine, I would be the person she wants me to be. Like ordering a new dress from a shop, a new dress that nobody ever wore, a new dress that nobody's ever going to wear but you. I wouldn't get mad suddenly, about nothing. I wouldn't walk out of places suddenly, about nothing. I wouldn't snarl at nice people. About what she says is nothing. I wouldn't be "unbearable." Her word "unbearable." A female word, female as a cat. Well, she's right, too. I am unbearable. "George," he said to the waiter, "I am unbearable, did you know that?" "No sir, I did not, sir," said the waiter. "I would not call you unbearable, Mr. Kirk." "Well, you don't know, George," he said. "It just happens that I am unbearable. It just happened that way. It's a long story." "Yes, sir," said the waiter.

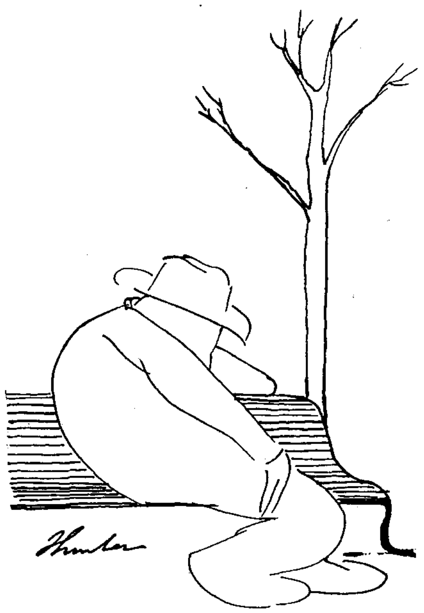
"FEMALE as a cat." This passage recalls one of the things that have dated Thurber's work; namely, its relentless misogyny. There is a vein of humor in the writing which seems too often a near-companion of simple woman-hating, and it makes him a hard writer to take these days. It isn't so much that Thurber records the war between men and women, since that goes on to this day. It's that he takes it for granted that in the last panel the women surrender.

Still, a couple of things can be said in his defense. First, the only reason that Thurber's women are so tough is that, as Wilfrid Sheed has pointed out, they spend so much time carrying Thurber's men around. Given the choice between women idealized to the point of emptiness and women made real to the point of nastiness, any intelligent woman would choose the second, I think. And, in any case, if Thurber wasn't always right about women, he was always right about marriage. He sensed intuitively that the conditions of modern marriage—the essential twoness, cut off from a big supporting cast of children and extended family—made life into a perpetual contest. His ear for the tiny, absurd contest that opens onto a vista of grievance and loathing is still unmatched: the couple in "A Couple of Hamburgers," who search for a diner, for instance:

> "You think you're *so* funny. I think I know the one you mean," she said, after a moment. "It's right in the town and it sits at an angle from the road. They're never so good, for some reason." He glared at her and almost ran up against the curb. "What the hell do you mean 'sits at an angle from the road'?" he cried. He was very hungry now. "Well, it isn't silly," she said, calmly. "I've noticed the ones that sit at an angle. They're cheaper, because they fitted them into funny little pieces of ground. The big ones parallel to the road are the best." He drove right through Torrington, his lips compressed. "Angle from the road, for God's sake!" he snarled, finally. She was looking out her window.

There had been a lot of "he said, she said" humor before, but until Thurber nobody quite set down the way tiny irritations can become vast wars, or captured the pleasure both sides take in the war once it starts. (The stuff is timeless. Junior-varsity Thurber wife, in a pouring rain, in 1994 on Second Avenue at midnight as husband tries to get a cab: "I don't want this one. The ones who pull over from the middle lane are always Haitian. The ones who cruise along the left-hand side are Sikhs. They make better drivers.")

THE Second World War pretty much put an end to Thurber's achievement as a writer. He knew it himself, writing, long afterward, that his best years "extended roughly from the time Lindbergh flew the Atlantic to the day coffee was rationed." When the war came, you could no longer write, as Thurber had, as if the lives and worries of the people in a few buildings in Manhattan mattered to you more than the destiny of the planet. Thurber's subject was anxiety rather than suffering, and the war ended the first by producing the second. Either you grew up or you didn't. Liebling did, and became a great writer; White found a cause and absorbed the Bomb into his writing—in, for example,



FROM THE NEW YORKER, JANUARY 8, 1938

“The Morning of the Day They Did It.” Thurber went on writing thirties pieces into the forties—sometimes terrifically well: a style that good isn’t killed off easily—and then he went on writing them well into the fifties, by which time they seemed to be coming from some other planet. The last five years of his work are filled with bad puns and long, relentless, unstoppable, meandering accounts of drunken parties.

In his best work, the flight from the outer world to the inner world was a flight from one kind of reality to another. In his late work, he was in flight from every kind of reality there was. He did find two other outlets for his talent, though. He wrote a series of children’s books, which mostly don’t work, since they were unconsciously written for grownups. One of them, though, “Many Moons,” is a simple fable, and, because its explicit subject is a longing for innocence, it works beautifully for every age. And he wrote and illustrated his “Fables for Our Time,” every one of which is a gem. But, beyond those flights, it was hard. He was going blind, he was drunk most of the time, and he was in pain. All those writers who had come to New York to write as he had written went to hear him talk and, after one visit, mostly never went back.

Where can his voice be heard now? In the mainstream of American popular humor, Thurber is inaudible. Dave Barry, for instance, a truly gifted phrasemaker and humorist, who has set the tone for most recent pop humor, has returned to the frenetic, hyperbolic line of Twain. “I am not making this up” is his mantra. For Barry and his followers, it’s as if Thurber never existed. Only Garrison Keillor is still self-consciously in Thurber’s debt. But in Keillor’s work there is a nostalgia, a longing for the Midwestern past, that is rooted, I think, in a tacit understanding, shared with his audience, that the Lake Wobegon he describes so lovingly is really no more—that it’s been Wal-Marted and malled right out of existence. For Thurber, the meagre life of Columbus was still there, waiting to enfold him again. When he said nostalgically, near the end of his life, that the clocks that struck in his dreams were often the clocks of Columbus, he was describing a man who is waking up in a sweat, hearing loud alarms still going off.

He was in a panic that they would get him late, the way they had got him early. They never did get him, quite. His tone is still heard now, I think, mostly in the dreamier, speculative far reaches of American fiction; Donald Barthelme took the part of Thurber that sounded a little like Kafka and, passing it through the prism of his own literary mind, made himself sound like an American Kafka who had happened to read some Thurber. (You still hear that side of Thurber today in Barthelme’s students—in Nicholson Baker’s writing, for instance.) And, although Thurber had no real critic’s gift himself, his voice—the record of a mind paying attention to its own dubious responses and subterfuges and suspicions—remains, in its tone of baffled, vigilant curiosity, the best critic’s voice. Many of the fledglings who admired him have ended up spending too much of their lives as reviewers because, in part, his was the perfect reviewer’s tone. A timid and world-weary and apprehensive curiosity gracefully turning itself into rueful wisdom: pull that off, and you feel as though you were walking on air.

In a sense, it’s maybe even a blessing—or, in any case, not so bad—that his work should have receded a little, since one of its virtues was its obstinate recessiveness. There seem to be two big patterns, or movements, in twentieth-century American comedy. One, rising from the immigrant experience, and uniting Ralph Kramden and Groucho and S. J. Perelman, rides a wave of aggression and mixed, eclectic burlesque. The other line, shorter but equally impressive, is contrarian: the resolute, disgruntled, thin-lipped resistance of the old Americans in the face of all that urban noise and fretfulness; the white man’s last line of resistance. It is there in W. C. Fields, out on the porch in “It’s a Gift,” trying to sleep amid all the intrusions, dreaming of past binges, wanting, above all, to be *left alone.* Thurber is the greatest writer of this strain of comic American misery, just as the realistic Fields is its greatest performer. “It just happens that I am unbearable. It just happened that way.” His tone may no longer get you through life, but it remains gallant in its melancholia and steadfast even in its orneriness.◆

FROM THE ARCHIVES

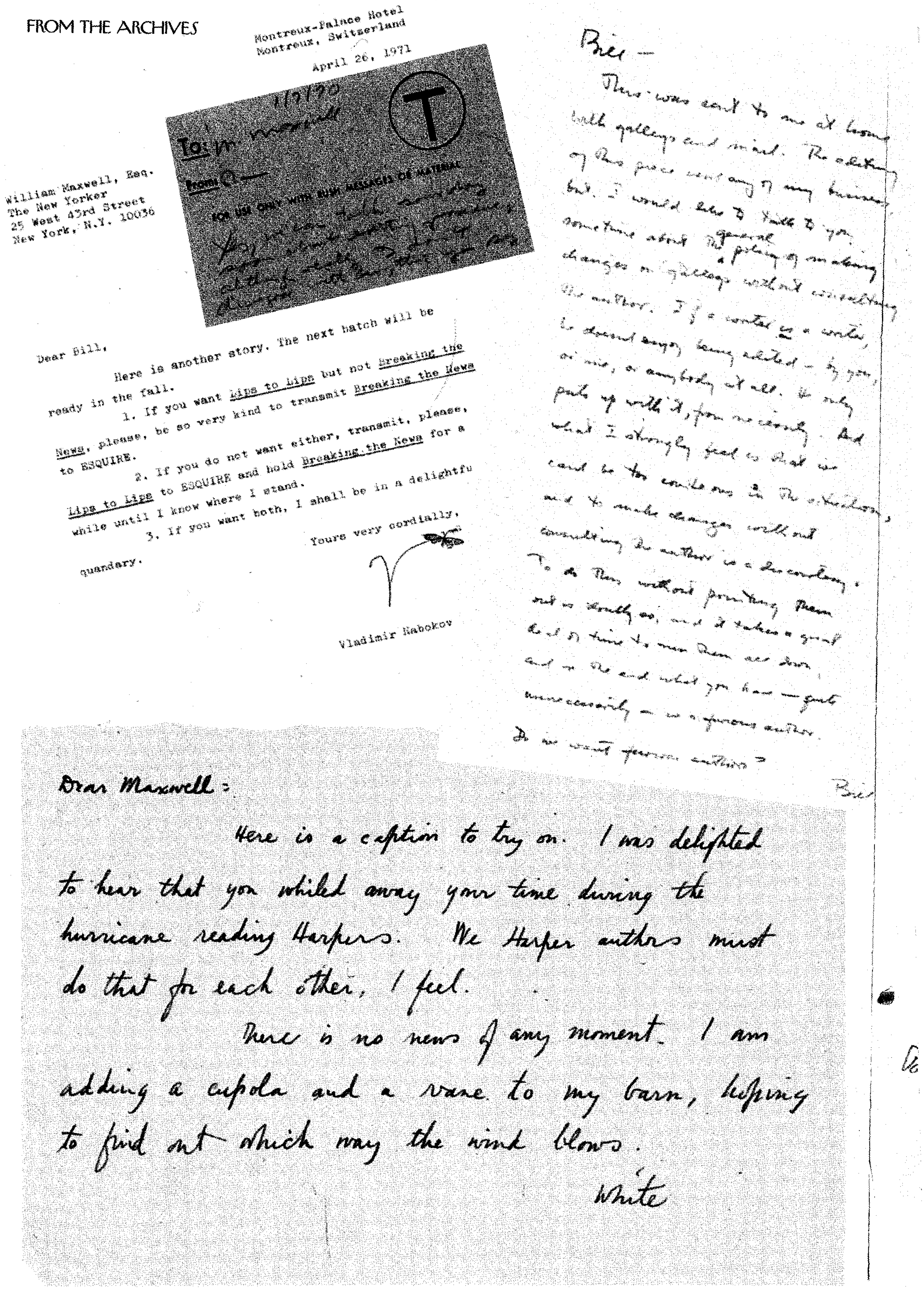
PAPER TRAIL

Judging, acquiring, editing, and publishing seventy years’ worth of fiction and humor leaves a wide paper trail. Actually, a trail isn’t big enough for all the covering letters, memos, revisions, galley proofs, page proofs, and letters of cajolery, remonstration, and gratitude that are involved in this enterprise. Paper boulevard is more like it.

The literary documents arrayed on the next two pages were picked from the files—boxes in the attic, actually—of William Maxwell, who came to work as an assistant in our art department in 1936. After three months of handling cartoons and conveying editorial decisions to artists, Mr. Maxwell received an unexpected invitation from Wolcott Gibbs to edit a short story. “It was by Kay Boyle, and I thought it was dreadfully overwritten,” Mr. Maxwell said recently. “I did what I thought needed doing, and before I knew it, it was in galleys, pretty much as I edited it.”

Eudora Welty, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Mary McCarthy, Shirley Hazzard, and Vladimir Nabokov were among those who benefitted from Mr. Maxwell’s precise, restrained redaction in the ensuing forty years. Also the three Johns—O’Hara, Cheever, and Updike. All the while, Mr. Maxwell was writing stories and novels of his own, and this two-hat career no doubt helped him to practice editorial medicine with such sympathy and modesty that his patients actually looked forward to their next appointment. He never feared or bullied talent in others. These letters and memos of his vary not only in purpose but in typeface, hand, and hue. In their variegation, they represent a species endangered by the homogenizing tendencies of computer technology. In their content, they illustrate the level and scope of Maxwell’s work in particular and the rewards and vexations of every editor’s life. —Daniel Menaker

FROM THE ARCHIVES



Montreux-Palace Hotel
Montreux, Switzerland

April 26, 1971

1/7/70
To: Mr Maxwell
From: R—
FOR USE ONLY WITH RUSH MESSAGES OF MATERIAL
[illegible]

William Maxwell, Esq.
The New Yorker
25 West 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Bill,

Here is another story. The next batch will be ready in the fall.

1. If you want Lips to Lips but not Breaking the News, please, be so very kind to transmit Breaking the News to ESQUIRE.

2. If you do not want either, transmit, please, Lips to Lips to ESQUIRE and hold Breaking the News for a while until I know where I stand.

3. If you want both, I shall be in a delightfu quandary.

Yours very cordially,

Vladimir Nabokov

Bill —

This was sent to me at home with galleys and mail. The editing of this piece wasn't any of my business but. I would like to talk to you sometime about the general policy of making changes in galleys without consulting the author. If a writer is a writer, he doesn't enjoy being edited — by you, or me, or anybody at all. He only puts up with it, from necessity. And what I strongly feel is that we cannot be too courteous in the editing, and to make changes without consulting the author is a discourtesy. To do them without printing them out is doubly so, and it takes a great deal of time to [illegible] them all [illegible] and in the end what you have — quite unnecessarily — is a furious author. Do we want furious authors?

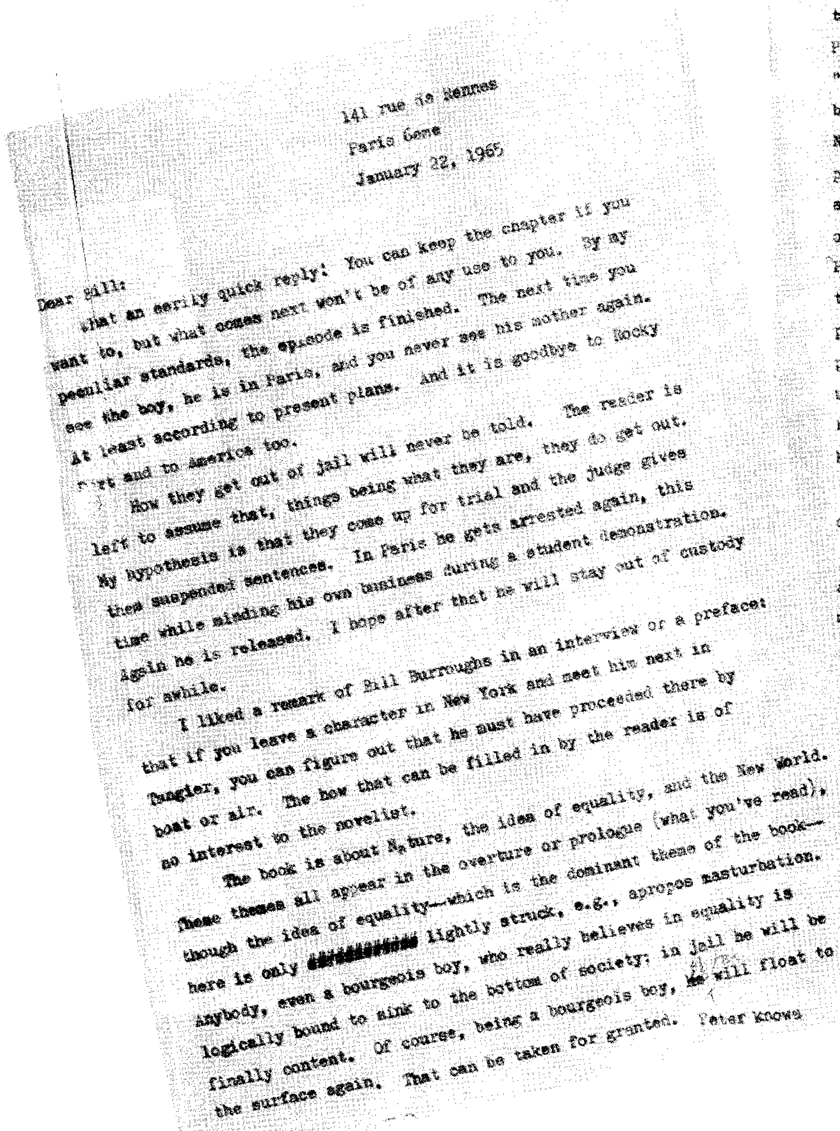
Bill

Dear Maxwell:

Here is a caption to try on. I was delighted to hear that you whiled away your time during the hurricane reading Harpers. We Harper authors must do that for each other, I feel.

There is no news of any moment. I am adding a cupola and a vane to my barn, hoping to find out which way the wind blows.

White



141 rue de Rennes
Paris 6eme
January 22, 1965

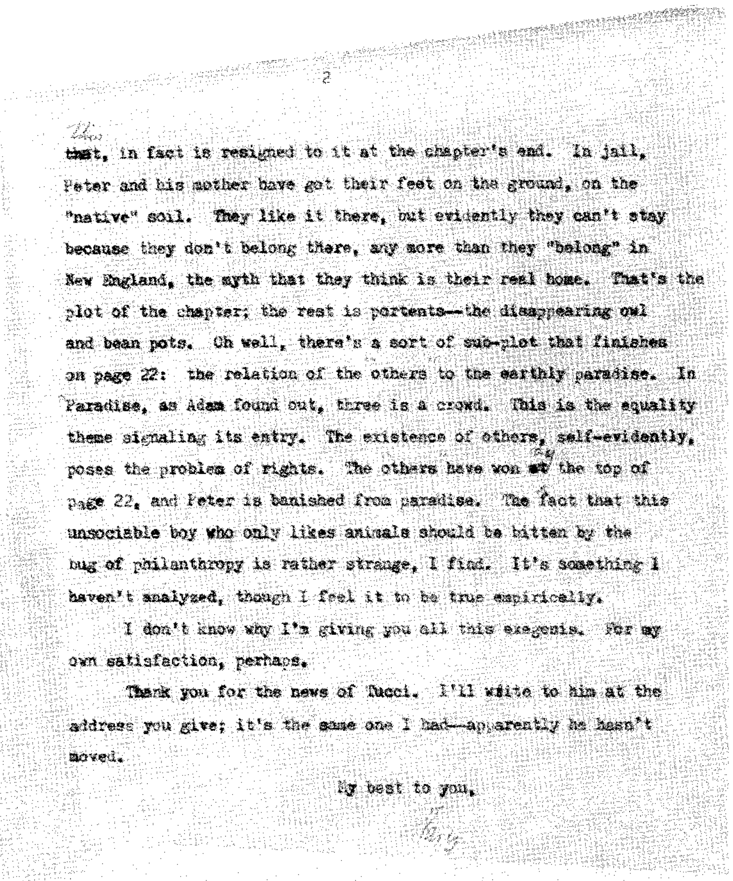
Dear Bill:

What an eerily quick reply! You can keep the chapter if you want to, but what comes next won't be of any use to you. By my peculiar standards, the episode is finished. The next time you see the boy, he is in Paris, and you never see his mother again. At least according to present plans. And it is goodbye to Rocky Port and to America too.

How they get out of jail will never be told. The reader is left to assume that, things being what they are, they do get out. My hypothesis is that they come up for trial and the judge gives them suspended sentences. In Paris he gets arrested again, this time while minding his own business during a student demonstration. Again he is released. I hope after that he will stay out of custody for awhile.

I liked a remark of Bill Burroughs in an interview or a preface: that if you leave a character in New York and meet him next in Tangier, you can figure out that he must have proceeded there by boat or air. The how that can be filled in by the reader is of no interest to the novelist.

The book is about Nature, the idea of equality, and the New World. These themes all appear in the overture or prologue (what you've read), though the idea of equality—which is the dominant theme of the book—here is only [illegible] lightly struck, e.g., apropos masturbation. Anybody, even a bourgeois boy, who really believes in equality is logically bound to sink to the bottom of society; in jail he will be finally content. Of course, being a bourgeois boy, ~~he~~ [illegible] will float to the surface again. That can be taken for granted. Peter knows



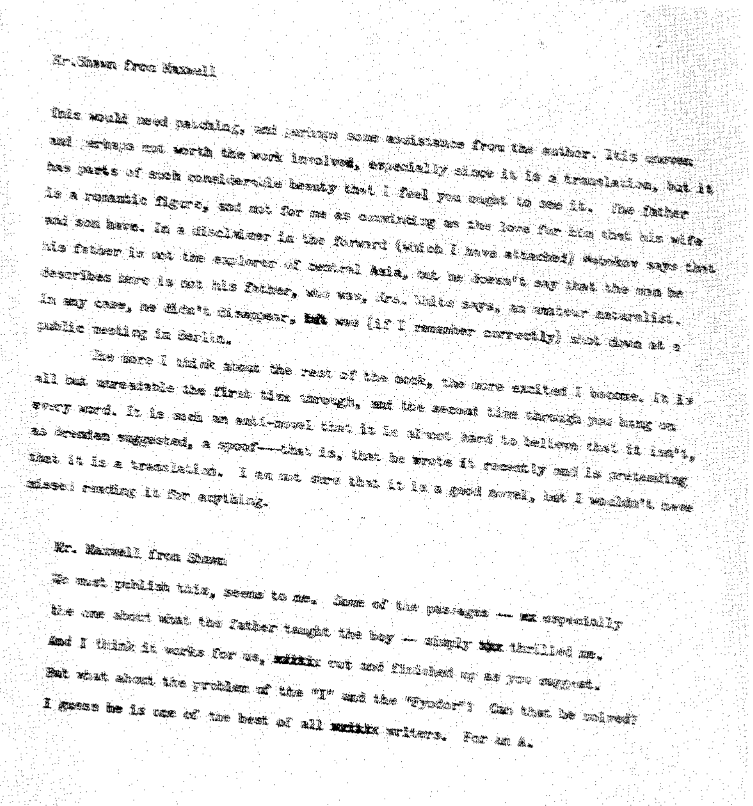
2

~~that~~ this, in fact is resigned to it at the chapter's end. In jail, Peter and his mother have got their feet on the ground, on the "native" soil. They like it there, but evidently they can't stay because they don't belong there, any more than they "belong" in New England, the myth that they think is their real home. That's the plot of the chapter; the rest is portents—the disappearing owl and bean pots. Oh well, there's a sort of sub-plot that finishes on page 22: the relation of the others to the earthly paradise. In Paradise, as Adam found out, three is a crowd. This is the equality theme signaling its entry. The existence of others, self-evidently, poses the problem of rights. The others have won ~~at~~ by the top of page 22, and Peter is banished from paradise. The fact that this unsociable boy who only likes animals should be bitten by the bug of philanthropy is rather strange, I find. It's something I haven't analyzed, though I feel it to be true empirically.

I don't know why I'm giving you all this exegesis. For my own satisfaction, perhaps.

Thank you for the news of Tucci. I'll write to him at the address you give; it's the same one I had—apparently he hasn't moved.

My best to you,
Mary



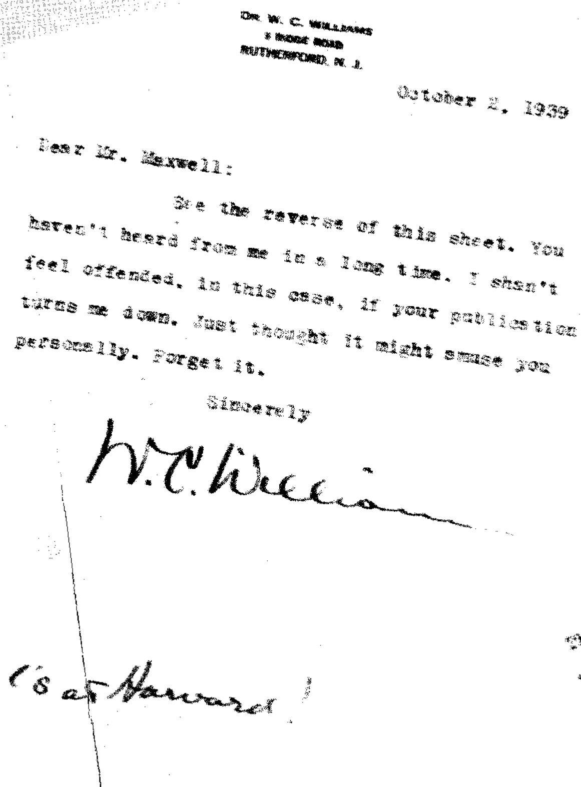
Mr. Shawn from Maxwell

This would need patching, and perhaps some assistance from the author. It's uneven and perhaps not worth the work involved, especially since it is a translation, but it has parts of such considerable beauty that I feel you ought to see it. The father is a romantic figure, and not for me as convincing as the love for him that his wife and son have. In a disclaimer in the forward (which I have attached) Nabokov says that his father is not the explorer of Central Asia, but he doesn't say that the man he describes here is not his father, who was, Mrs. White says, an amateur naturalist. In any case, he didn't disappear, but was (if I remember correctly) shot down at a public meeting in Berlin.

The more I think about the rest of the book, the more excited I become. It is all but unreadable the first time through, and the second time through you hang on every word. It is such an anti-novel that it is almost hard to believe that it isn't, as Brendan suggested, a spoof—that is, that he wrote it recently and is pretending that it is a translation. I am not sure that it is a good novel, but I wouldn't have missed reading it for anything.

Mr. Maxwell from Shawn

We must publish this, seems to me. Some of the passages — xx especially the one about what the father taught the boy — simply ~~thr~~ thrilled me. And I think it works for us, xxxxx cut and finished up as you suggest. But what about the problem of the "I" and the "Fyodor"? Can that be solved? I guess he is one of the best of all xxxxx writers. For an A.



Dr. W. C. Williams
9 Ridge Road
Rutherford, N. J.

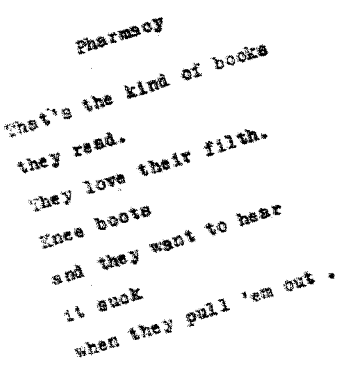
October 2, 1939

Dear Mr. Maxwell:

See the reverse of this sheet. You haven't heard from me in a long time. I shan't feel offended, in this case, if your publication turns me down. Just thought it might amuse you personally. Forget it.

Sincerely
W. C. Williams

(S at Harvard!

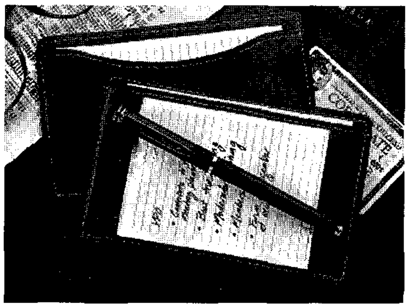


Pharmacy

That's the kind of books
they read.
They love their filth.
Knee boots
and they want to hear
it suck
when they pull 'em out .

PAPER TRAIL

To and from fiction editor William Maxwell (clockwise from top left): a cover letter from Vladimir Nabokov; an exchange about editing between William Shawn and Maxwell; a letter from Mary McCarthy; Maxwell's and Shawn's reactions to a story; a poetry submission and a note from William Carlos Williams; and a memo from E. B. White.



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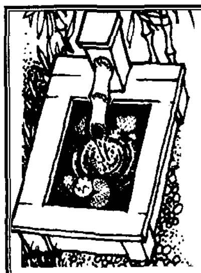

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BOOKS

LONE RIDER

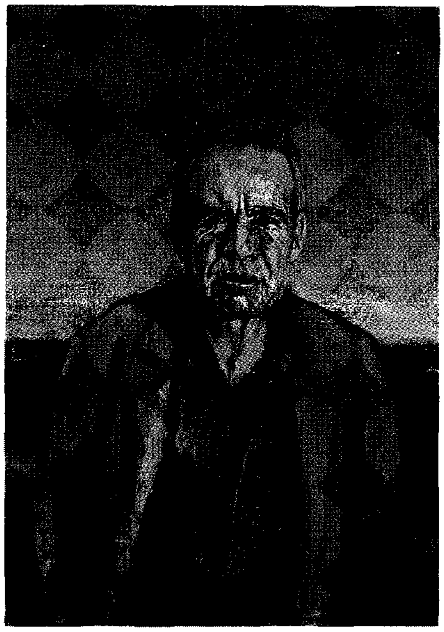
BY CHARLES McGRATH

The Crossing
by Cormac McCarthy
(Knopf; $23)

CORMAC McCARTHY may be the last of the great overwriters—that long-winded, thesaurus-thumbing tribe, now almost extinct, who believe that novelistic prose is not just a vehicle, a means of telling a story, but a *medium*, with a magnificence and an importance all its own. His style, derived in part from Faulkner and in part, perhaps, from Shakespeare and the Bible, is thick and slow-going, almost antique in its rhythms and diction; at times it seems calculated to send the reader rushing off to the dictionary, if not to Berlitz. (Many of his books contain long untranslated dialogues in Spanish, and one of them includes snippets of French and German as well.) Here's a high-flown example—a description of a child crying, from McCarthy's second novel, "Outer Dark":

> It howled execration upon the dim camarine world of its nativity wail on wail while he lay there gibbering with palsied jawhasps, his hands putting back the night like some witless paraclete beleaguered with all limbo's clamor.

In fairness, it should be added that McCarthy is capable of writing a simple declarative sentence, and that he's also a master of colloquialism and understatement. But he's uninterested in the kind of heightened clarity that amounts to invisibility in prose, and seldom descends to the informal, conversational tone characteristic of so much classic American fiction. Even his most straightforward passages have about them a shimmer of grandness—achieved sometimes by importing arcane vocabulary, sometimes by repetition or by tinkering with word order, and sometimes just by stretching a sentence out with "and"s until it acquires the desired pace and gravity. McCarthy never lets you forget that what you're reading is *writing*.



Cormac McCarthy: The last of the great overwriters.

JARRETT HUDDLESTON

Presumably, it was the density of his prose—and its way of making no concessions to the reader—that for years helped consign McCarthy to the ranks of the cult writers, fiercely admired but only by a passionate few. But there were some other obstacles as well: his gothic preoccupations—incest, necrophilia, genocide—and his gloomy philosophizing. McCarthy's novels are ostensibly historical, set either in the last half of the previous century or in the first half of the present one, but most of them describe a world that is, for all intents and purposes, either prehistoric or post-apocalyptic: a barren, hostile place in which civilization—and any recognizable notion of morality—is scarcely discernible. For example, "Blood Meridian" (subtitled "The Evening Redness in the West"), a Melvillean depiction of scalp-hunting, is set in a blighted landscape straight out of "The Road Warrior"—an end-of-the-road stretch in which "the ragged flames fled down the wind as if sucked by some maelstrom out there in the void, some vortex in that waste apposite to which man's transit and his reckonings alike lay abrogate." The characters, with names

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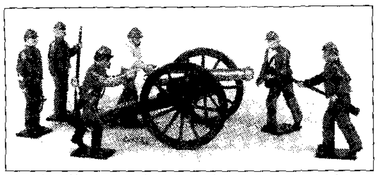

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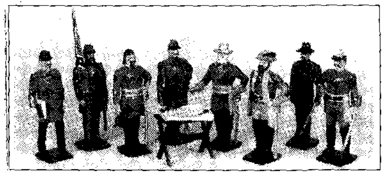

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like Toadvine and "expriest" (McCarthy disdains the smaller niceties of punctuation, such as quotation marks, the hyphen, and the apostrophe, and he's stingy with commas), end up wandering over a vast sheep-and-mule boneyard, pursued by an umbrella-toting judge and his attendant, a semi-clad fool, in a way that suggests Samuel Beckett on a visit to the Wild West.

Most of the people who inhabit McCarthy's books only barely qualify as human; they're brutish and inarticulate, driven by lust and rage and instinct. And the novels themselves are virtually plotless, stringing together random and arbitrary incidents, many of them unspeakably cruel and violent. McCarthy loves gore almost as much as he loves fustian. At times, his scenes of violence take on a Homeric quality, turning into lengthy catalogues of fateful slaughter, while at others his fascination with dismemberment is so exaggerated that it's almost cartoonish. A beheading scene—again from "Blood Meridian"—lingers over four "ropes" of blood, two thick and two slender, spurting from the dead man's neck, and leaves him there, like a figure in a George Romero film, drenched in red but with a cigarillo still burning between his fingers.

For all McCarthy's excesses, his books have a certain homespun grandeur, and this, together with their Peckinpah-like luridness and excitement, caused his early fans, including a number of English Department honchos, to see in him an authentic epic visionary. Nevertheless, his weird brew of high diction and grim subject remained for most people a taste that was hard to acquire. But in 1992 McCarthy's reputation changed almost overnight with the publication of the brilliant and riveting "All the Pretty Horses," which won the National Book Award that year and became a bestseller, bringing tens of thousands of new readers into the fold and chastening many among the previously unconverted, sending them back to the earlier books to see what they had overlooked.

"All the Pretty Horses" had its share of bombastic passages, and of cosmic sententiousness, but it also attained a genuine lyric freedom:

> They coursed the young mares and

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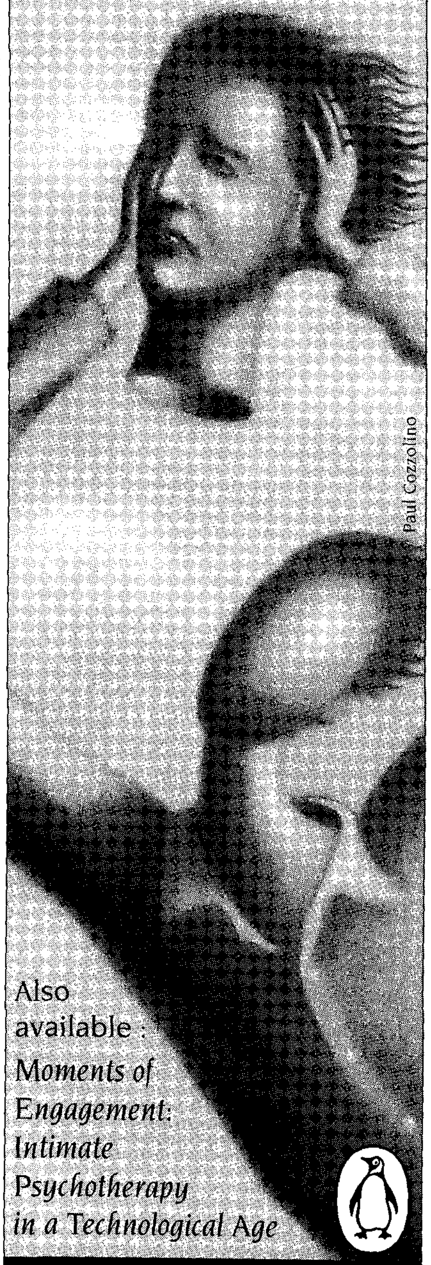

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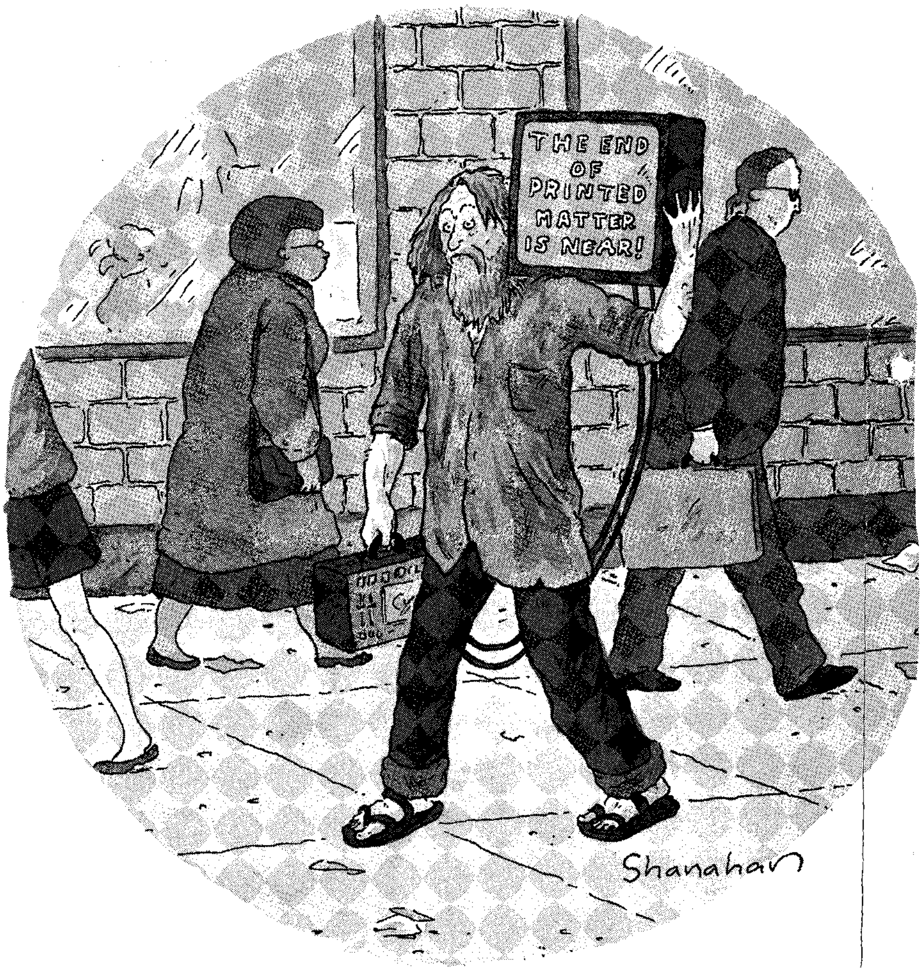
THE END OF PRINTED MATTER IS NEAR!
Shanahan

• •

> fillies over the plain where their rich bay and their rich chestnut colors shone in the sun and the young colts ran with their dams and trampled down the flowers in a haze of pollen that hung in the sun like powdered gold and they ran he and the horses out along the high mesas where the ground resounded under their running hooves and they flowed and changed and ran and their manes and tails blew off of them like spume and there was nothing else at all in that high world.

This book had characters who weren't troglodytes: the chivalric sixteen-year-old, John Grady Cole; his wisecracking sidekick, Lacey Rawlins; and the irksome, tale-spinning Jimmy Blevins, who is a figure almost unique in McCarthy—someone comic and lovable. And it had a story—a page-turner, in fact: a spare, compelling narrative that followed the three principals over the Texas border and into Mexico soon after the Second World War, and turned a search for a missing horse into a heroic quest. "All the Pretty Horses" even provided a romantic subplot, a somewhat improbable love affair between John Grady and the daughter of a wealthy Mexican rancher. (Though no doubt part of the book's wider appeal, this romance caused some diehard McCarthyites to worry that their man was softening, and to pine for the days of incest and necrophilia.) John Grady is almost too good to be true—he's brave, resourceful, and wise beyond his years—but in him McCarthy manages to reinvent the old Hemingway notion of heroism, of solitary grace and understated manliness, with a fresh purity and directness. You care about John Grady, almost to the same degree that you don't quite believe in him.

ONE of the enticements of "All the Pretty Horses," for old and new fans alike, was that it was billed as the first volume of McCarthy's "Border Trilogy." The second part, "The Crossing," is finally out this month, but it may not fully satisfy either camp. For one thing, this installment does not, as one assumed it might, pick up the story of John Grady, who at the end of the last book was left wandering alone in a "bloodred" desert. Instead, "The Crossing" begins about ten years earlier, in 1939, and introduces a brand-new sixteen-year-old hero, Billy Parham, who sets off on a quest of his own. What's going to hold this trilogy together, it's now apparent, is not plot but setting (again, the rugged border country) and imagery (more equine poetry) and the author's fixation on the nature of heroism and the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The new book is not as scary as some of McCarthy's earlier ones (though its most harrowing scene, a three-page description of a wound being cleaned, is not for the squeamish), and it's even less tightly plotted. It never settles for anything as simple as romance—Billy is uncomprehending when his younger brother, Boyd, runs off with a Mexican girl—but it is animated at times by an un-McCarthy-like nostalgia for domesticity: a yearning for the rituals of home. And, as you can tell just by picking the book up ("The Crossing" is a hundred pages longer than "All the Pretty Horses"), McCarthy has reopened the gas cocks, inflating his prose until the needle is back up in the red zone: "A world burning on the shore of an unknowable void. A world construed out of blood and blood's alcahest and blood in its core and in its integument because it was that nothing save blood had power to resonate against that void which threatened hourly to devour it." It's as if he felt that, with a best-seller behind him, he was in danger of being mistaken for a drugstore novelist, another Louis L'Amour, unless he renewed his claim to the highest seriousness.

At the outset, "The Crossing" sustains a narrative just as exciting as that of "All the Pretty Horses"—the story of Billy and a fierce she-wolf, who becomes, in fact, one of McCarthy's most complicated and fully developed characters. She's like a feral version of J. R. Ackerley's dog Tulip, her fur "a grayish dun with paler tips at the ruff and a black stripe along the back," her eyes almond-shaped and "deep yellow, deepening to amber at the iris," and she's even more cunning, outwitting numerous attempts at capture. With great patience and ingenuity, Billy finally traps

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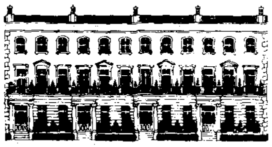

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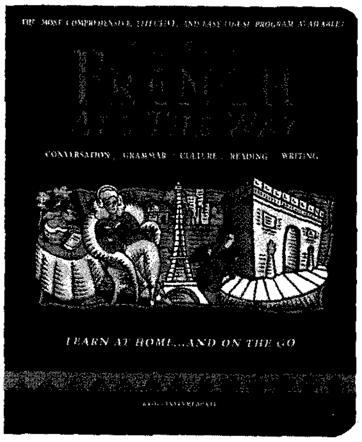

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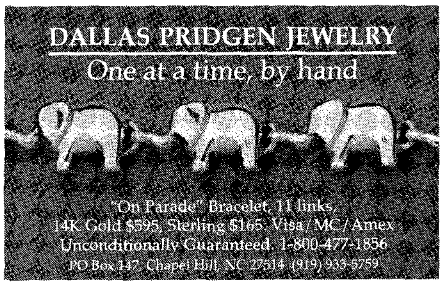
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the wolf in the Arizona hill country, and, moved by admiration for its bravery and intelligence, half tames it and leads it on a halter down into Mexico, where he presumably hopes to release it. It's a kind of "Lassie, Go Away" story, all the more affecting for its avoidance of sentimentality and anthropomorphizing.

But unaccountably, on page 129, McCarthy virtually starts the novel over again, returning Billy to New Mexico, where he finds that his father and mother have been murdered and the family horses stolen; Billy and Boyd then saddle up and head back across the border in search of restitution. The plot, like so many of the sentences, is dragged out and attenuated, punctuated now and then by a burst of action or little morsels of perfectly rendered cowboyspeak:

> Let me have the pistol.
> What do you aim to do with it?
> Put it in the man's mochila it belongs to.
> You *think* he's dead?
> If he aint he will be.
> Then what difference does it make?

There are lots of literal crossings in this part of the story, as Billy wanders back and forth between the United States and a Mexico that grows steadily older and more primitive; and along the way—it's hard to say where, exactly—a metaphorical transition occurs, as it becomes apparent that in the course of his roamings Billy has disqualified himself from any kind of human community. Even the Army won't have him (the physical turns up a heart murmur), and when he drops by a homestead not far from where he grew up, with its warm, companionable dining-room light and familiar household objects, the place seems to him alien and strange. Much of the book is given over to a series of gnomic, freighted encounters with various sages and symbolic figures—a peasant woman, a religious fanatic, a visionary blind man, a travelling carnival, a band of gypsies hauling a wrecked airplane through the trees—which seem intended to educate Billy in the nature of his solitariness and in the proper relation of the questing hero to the vast, indifferent universe. Some of these encounters are virtually silent, but others, alas, are lengthy sermons. The world, we learn, is "sentient to its core and secret and black beyond imagining," and it is also "not a thing at all but . . . a tale," and not just any tale but a tale that is the "sum of all the lesser tales and yet these also are the selfsame tale and contain as well all else within them." At the end of the book, which leaves Billy, like John Grady, alone in the desert, it's clear that both he and the novel have inexorably crossed over into that desolate, twilit country which the reader has by now come to recognize as McCarthyland: a lonely expanse of symbolic shadows and brooding metaphors, with the sun sinking slowly, slowly in the west, and the evening breeze just stirring now amidst the ancient boulders and stunted cacti, carrying with it an eerie, crepuscular echo—the sound, at once familiar and forlorn, of a clattering typewriter. (This is, needless to say, no country for editors, or for critics. Were one of them to show up here, in his J. Crew blazer, with his freshly sharpened pencils, he would surely come to a quick and unpleasant end.)

PEOPLE used to write novels like "The Crossing" all the time, of course—dense, wordy epics that attempted to explain the universe, or to create a new one (think of John Dos Passos, Katherine Anne Porter, James Gould Cozzens)—and no one complained. On the contrary, to attempt anything less was to risk seeming unambitious and "minor." Part of McCarthy's strangeness, and of his appeal, is that he remains steadfastly indifferent to the changes in fictional conventions and readers' expectations which made his kind of book go out of date even before he started writing it. His style is so old it looks new. In today's literary climate, there's something shocking, even inspiring, about McCarthy's brand of ambition. To go to "The Crossing" from a lot of contemporary, "postmodern" novels, with their bored, druggy couplings and their feverishly self-regarding plots, is like going from a K mart to a cathedral—a tin-roofed, adobe-patched cathedral, perhaps, whose windows leak and whose

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organ's out of tune, but an edifice of substance nonetheless. They don't build them like this anymore.

Not that what McCarthy is practicing is anything as simple or as comforting as the old middle-class religion of art. His universe is so bleak and incomprehensible that all religions are doomed to failure, and art is present in his books only in the guise, half ironic and half sentimental, of travelling carnival and circus troupes. Nobody reads here; nobody sketches or draws; the cowpokes never hum, let alone sing. In the end, McCarthy is neither an aesthete nor a philosopher but something much older: he aspires, I think, to a kind of pre-modernism—the incantatory storytelling of that glinty-eyed shaman who used to lumber out of the woods and preside at the evening campfire. McCarthy's books are propelled by a powerful and primitive reductiveness—a wish to see the entire world in terms of good and evil, light and dark, man and beast. But they also reveal an equally primitive love of amplitude and inclusiveness—the epic bard's compulsion to take everything into account.

What sets McCarthy even further apart from his contemporaries is his fascination with those areas at the very boundary not just of the traditional novel but of human nature itself. Instinct interests him more than thought or emotion, and the large-scale workings of fate and necessity interest him more than everyday life. The trouble is that the only language he has in which to recite these ancient mysteries is our familiar, everyday one, and no amount of orating and pumping up can make it seem quite mysterious enough. It's when McCarthy is trying hardest, in fact, that he seems most fraudulent, while it is in apparently unremarkable moments that "The Crossing" comes closest to real wisdom—in the laconic, jokey banter of Billy and Boyd, and in the thrilling, Stubbs-like portrayals of dogs and horses. McCarthy's writing about animals—all his best writing, for that matter—has a lupine fluidity and attentiveness, an uncanny feeling for life under the skin. In fact, McCarthy himself is a little like a wolf: his smartness comes more from watching things than from pondering them.◆

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THIS SIDE OF COHERENCE

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography
by Jeffrey Meyers
(HarperCollins; $27.50)

THE life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, in the half century since it ended, has become more celebrated and paradigmatic than any of the lives found in his fiction. Dead at forty-four, he seems a sacrifice, but to what god and by what priestly hand remain mysterious. The aura is Dionysian, but the circumstances are peculiarly American. He gave us his own epitaph, writing in one of his notebooks, "There are no second acts in American lives." If Hemingway was the master of danger abroad, purposefully experienced in foreign wars and Spanish bullfights and African safaris, Fitzgerald flattered our national consciousness with a sense of domestic danger, of the failure and rebuke that haunt every aspiration, of youthful overreaching swiftly followed by adult collapse, of a native romanticism courting the vengeance of blind destiny. His life in fact had three acts, more or less, the curtains conveniently falling each time on the end of a decade: his yearning Midwestern youth as a delicate, shabby-genteel Roman Catholic raised among the wide lawns and Scandinavian beauties of St. Paul, Minnesota, wherefrom he exuberantly launched himself into anticlimactic, antiheroic careers at Princeton, in the Army, and in New York advertising; the twenties, which he helped invent with his buoyant and hectic first novel, "This Side of Paradise" (1920), and which he ornamented with his celebrated carousing, his fetchingly named Alabama belle of a wife, Zelda, and his restless international travels as a highly paid celebrity author, and which he saw crash in rough synchrony with his own fortunes, in 1929; and the thirties, when, with depleted energies and a dwindled public, he shouldered the responsibilities of a wife in mental institutions and a daughter in private schools, and ended as a failed scriptwriter in Hollywood, fiddling away at an unfinished novel, "The Last Tycoon," and writing skimpy little pieces for *Esquire* for which he received a few hundred dollars each—he who in his heyday commanded four thousand dollars a story from *The Saturday Evening Post*. His burial, in 1940, to the tune of nostalgic and condescending obituaries, was the prelude to a postwar resurrection that sees him now as a favorite of college curriculums, the literary embodiment of the Jazz Age, and the third of a sacred trinity whose two other members are Hemingway and Faulkner.

It is a fine story, both monitory and inspirational, and Jeffrey Meyers, who has previously written biographies of Hemingway, Lawrence, Conrad, Poe, Wyndham Lewis, and Katherine Mansfield, among others, has chosen to tell it once again. Why he has carried more coals to this particular Newcastle his brief preface offers to explain by quoting the novelist Jay McInerney, who several years ago, in *The New York Review of Books*, ticked off "Bruccoli's hagiographic *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, and James R. Mellow's peevish, sordid *Invented Lives*, as well as Scott Donaldson's folksy psychoanalysis in *Fool for Love* . . . Arthur Mizener's excellent and grim *The Far Side of Paradise*, Andrew Turnbull's biography memoir *Scott Fitzgerald* and Nancy Milford's feminist revisionist *Zelda*," and concluded, "What doesn't emerge from any of these books is the sense of a coherent personality." Mr. Meyers in his preface explains:

> Though I have profited in various ways from the earlier biographies, my book on Scott is more analytic and interpretative. It discusses the meaning as well as the events of his life and seeks to illuminate the recurrent patterns that reveal his inner self. This biography places much greater emphasis on Scott's drinking; on Zelda's hospitals and doctors, especially Oscar Forel and Robert Carroll; on his love affairs, before and after Zelda's breakdown.

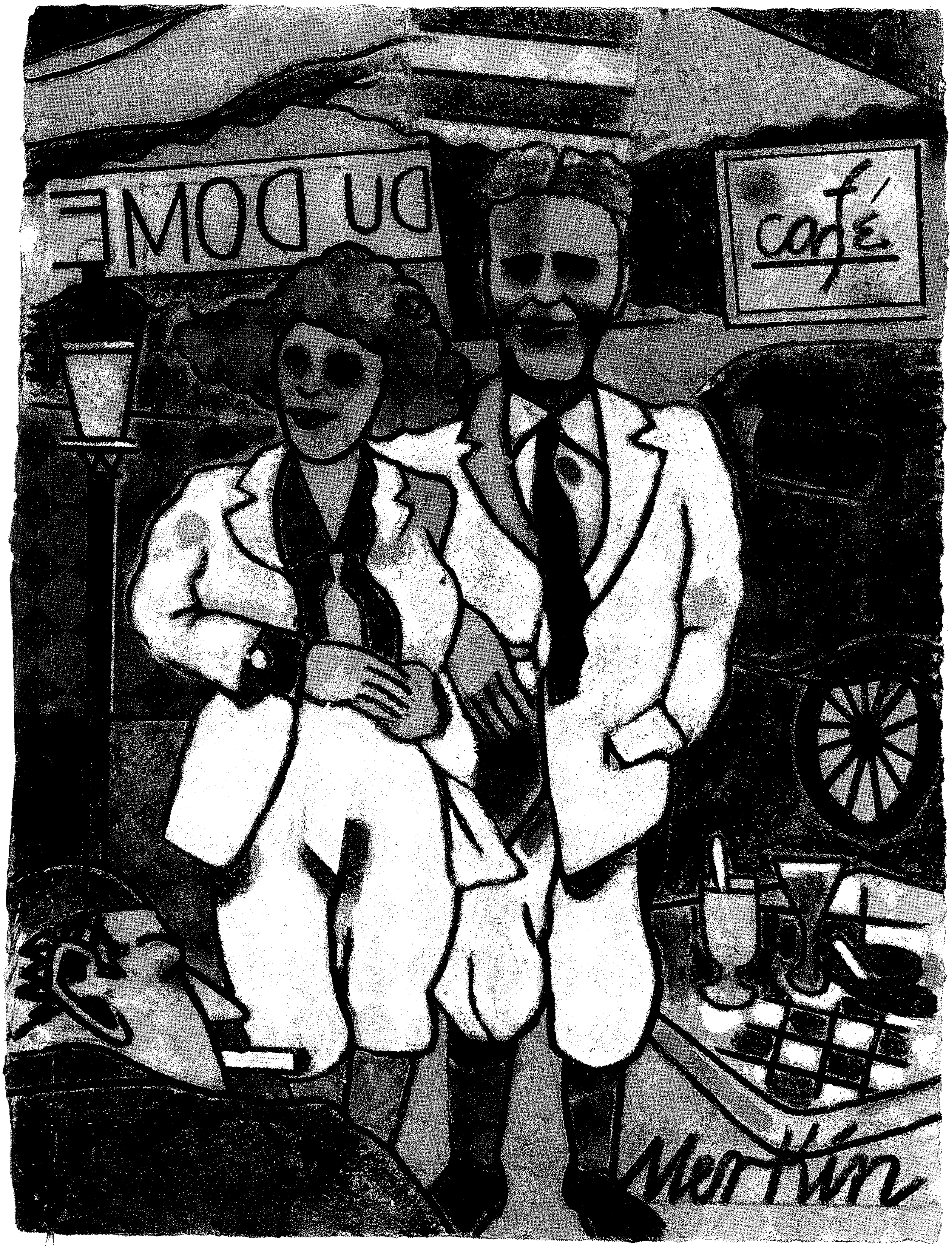
Of course. The dirt, the lowdown. Let's have it, especially if it helps us grasp a coherent personality. By way of additional justification, Meyers affixes an epigraph from Raymond Chandler, who, sounding tough, says, in part, "Fitzgerald is a subject no one has a right to mess up. Nothing but the best will do for him. I think he just missed being a great writer, and the reason is pretty obvious. If the poor guy was already an alcoholic in his college days, it's a marvel that he did as well as he did."

After these intimidating preliminaries, however, Mr. Meyers' expatiation upon the seamy and medical details of Fitzgerald's life serves to make larger and more paradoxical the cleavages in Fitzgerald's personality—between the spendthrift and the strict accountant, between petty heedlessness and stoic gallantry, between an aptitude for chaos and a dream of order, between conceit and insecurity, between, professionally, a hack's opportunism and a pained, ever-revising Flaubertian refinement. Fitzgerald himself said, in his notebooks, "There never was a good biography of a good novelist. There couldn't be. He is too many people, if he's any good." And his life has been poured into books, not deeds. At the age of twenty-nine, Fitzgerald wrote to his Scribners editor, Maxwell Perkins, "My work is the only thing that makes me happy—except to be a little tight."

Before Mr. Meyers assembled his brief, we never knew quite how nasty a drunk Fitzgerald was. He repaid Gerald and Sara Murphy's elegant hospitality by "throwing Sara's gold-flecked Venetian wineglasses over the garden wall" and, when banned for this outrage, threw a can of garbage onto their patio while they were dining. As he and some friends were leaving the Casino at Juan-les-Pins, an old Frenchwoman held out a tray of nuts and candies, and Fitzgerald kicked the tray right out of her hands. He picked quarrels and started fistfights, which he usually got the worst of. A fierce malice and resentment emerged in the guise of pranks and teasing. He wrote in lipstick on the expensive dress of his friend John Peale Bishop's wife; dining with Hemingway and Edmund Wilson in New York, he turned the occasion into a revel of self-abasement. According to Wilson's journal:

> Scott with his head down on the table between us like the dormouse at the Mad Tea Party—lay down on floor, went to can

RICHARD MERKIN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Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald: He had a hard time depicting her. Love—and self-love—got in the way.

> and puked—alternately made us hold his hand and asked us whether we liked him and insulted us.

It was not the fact that Fitzgerald drank to excess that shocked his peers—they all did, by New Age standards—but that he held his liquor so badly. Meyers has a chemical explanation: Fitzgerald, like Edgar Allan Poe, "suffered from hypoglycemia, or lack of sugar in the blood, which interfered with the supply of glucose to the brain and gave Fitzgerald an abnormal craving, when he was not drinking, for chocolate and Coca-Cola. This disease made it difficult for him to metabolize and tolerate alcohol, which always had an immediate and catastrophic effect on his system." As medical authority, Meyers, in his extensive but rather inscrutably organized source notes at the back, cites only "The Oxford Textbook of Medicine." The symptoms he mentions—"insomnia, pallor and fatigue as well as aggressive speech, excessive sweating, visual blurring, muscular tremor, a sense of uncertainty, increasing confusion and, finally, unconsciousness"—might better be ascribed to chronic alcohol abuse, or possibly to the tubercular and cardiac ills that did afflict Fitzgerald. Matthew J. Bruccoli's biography takes up the hypoglycemia thesis at some length, and cites the pathologist William Ober, who, after examining Fitzgerald's records at Johns Hopkins Hospital, concluded, "There is no evidence for hypoglycemia whatsoever."

Also in a medical vein are Mr. Meyers' particulars about Zelda's treatment in a succession of Continental and American sanitariums, and a clinical examination of Fitzgerald's sexual abilities. His penis size—the topic of a piquant passage in Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast"—was normal enough, agree a trio of witnesses: Sheilah Graham, the writer's Hollywood mistress; an Asheville, North Carolina, prostitute called Lottie; and Fitzgerald's *Esquire* editor, Arnold Gingrich, who once saw him with his bathrobe open. Zelda, however, especially after an affair with a French aviator in 1924, found her husband inadequate and, as the Jazz Age nibbled away at her happiness, accused him of homosexuality. Elizabeth Beckwith MacKie, who had been acquainted with the young Fitzgerald in West Virginia, confided in a memoir, "In 1917, I'm afraid, Scott just wasn't a very lively male animal," and Arthur Mizener, after interviewing a St. Paul acquaintance of Fitzgerald's, Oscar Kalman, concluded that "Scott liked the idea of sex, for its romance and daring, but was not strongly sexed [and] was inclined to feel the actual act of sex was messy." An ineradicable moral streak dignified his writings but complicated his hedonism. Kalman expostulated to Mizener, "Poor Scott, he never really enjoyed his dissipation because he disapproved intensely of himself all the time it was going on."

There was in Fitzgerald's nature a feminine component that enabled him to write of female sensations and strategies with a rare empathy. He was slight in build, dainty of feature, and, like many another male undergraduate, had prettily donned female clothes in a college musical. Zelda and Sheilah Graham aside, his deeply felt admirations were of men: the epicene and learned priest Father Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay, who became his mentor at the Newman School, in New Jersey; the athletic and rich Tommy Hitchcock, who stood for his portrait as Tom Buchanan in "The Great Gatsby"; Ring Lardner, in whose stoic company Fitzgerald often drank until dawn on Long Island; and Hemingway, of whom he wrote in his notebooks, "I really loved him, but of course it wore out like a love affair. The fairies have spoiled all that." The idea that Fitzgerald was homosexual flitted through the gossip surrounding him, but he had stout conventional scorn for "fairies." Mr. Meyers does some original research on his subject's fairly extensive heterosexual contacts after Zelda's off-and-on-again institutionalization began, in 1930, and with a touch of incredulity relays Sheilah Graham's sexual contentment:

> Well informed about all shapes and sizes of male sexual organs, she found the tubercular, drug-addicted and often alcoholic Fitzgerald a creditable performer—"very satisfactory . . . in terms of giving physical pleasure." After lovemaking, they would lie happily in each other's arms for a long time.

The all but sneering tone is what is principally wrong with this biography. Mr. Meyers, like the practitioners of celebrity-centered tabloid journalism, shows his subjects no respect. He ransacks their lives for discreditable incidents and implications. Sheilah Graham, it is

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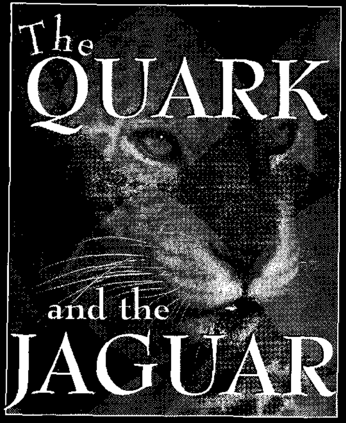
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implied above, was a sleep-around, Fitzgerald was a pathetic wreck, and they capped their corruption by postcoitally mooning in bed like a pair of sappy teen-agers. Meyers' whole presentation of Sheilah Graham is subtly poisoned. "Her series of gossipy autobiographies," he states, "tell a number of deliberate lies." Her rise from a London orphanage to success as an American gossip columnist is made to seem a tawdry trick, by way of a chorus line and an impotent older husband, and her invention of a new, American identity—in a Hollywood full of such inventions—is phrased as sinister psychological melodrama: "Sheilah, who had very little religious or family loyalty, consigned both her poverty and her Jewishness to the same black hole of denial." She had been born Lily Sheil, the sixth child of a father who died soon after her birth and a "sickly mother" who, in Meyers' vague phrase, was "a cook in an institution." Lily / Sheilah, after leaving the orphanage at fourteen, worked as a factory hand, an underhousemaid, and a toothbrush demonstrator in a department store. Fitzgerald in their relations comes forth as vicious, taunting her with her impoverished Jewish origins, threatening her with a gun, slapping her, humiliating her publicly. The reader inwardly cheers when she is reported to have responded to one of his suicide threats with the hearty, Hollywoodish "Shoot yourself, you son of a bitch. I didn't raise myself from the gutter to waste my life on a drunk like you." After his death, she discovered that he had scrawled "Portrait of a Prostitute" on the back of a photograph of herself she had given him. The liaison is seen as so predominantly sordid that such positive aspects as his "patiently teaching her to understand the books that he loved" and her need (characterized as "masochistic") "to care for a great (or once-great) man" come as grudging incidentals. It is left to other biographers to emphasize that Sheilah, whatever her limitations, was responsible and responsive in a way that Zelda had not been, and gave Fitzgerald a domestic stability in which he was, in his last year, overcoming the alcohol demon and picking up the pieces of his life and talent. Malcolm Cowley, in introducing his selection of twenty-eight Fitzgerald stories, tells us:

> His record of production for the last year of his life would have been remarkable for a man in perfect health. He began the year by making plans for a novel and, simultaneously, by writing twenty stories for *Esquire*. . . . Suddenly he resumed his interrupted correspondence with his friends and he sent his daughter an extraordinary series of letters that continued all through the year; perhaps they were too urgent and too full of tired wisdom for a girl in college, but then Fitzgerald was writing them as a sort of personal and literary testament. In the spring he wrote—and twice rewrote from the beginning—a scenario based on his story, "Babylon Revisited"; it was the best of his scenarios and, according to the producer who ordered it, the best he ever read.

Andrew Turnbull's biography, after admitting, "They were a curious pair—the broken novelist and the ambitious girl from the slums," points out, "In a sense Fitzgerald was fortunate to have been loved by anyone so vital and alluring. In his present state of frailty and eclipse, his choice was not unlimited." Turnbull as a boy had known Fitzgerald, as the renowned writer to whom his parents rented their Maryland house, and his biography retains a note of affectionate acquaintance and a willingness to be impressed. Bruccoli's "hagiographic" biography in its staccato fashion sums up the pros and cons of the situation: "He needed Sheilah and loved her; yet his puritan streak disapproved of their arrangement, which was circumspect by Hollywood standards." In this day of free and legal unmarried cohabitation, it is hard to imagine the old taint and strain of such arrangements; Arthur Mizener's fine pioneering biography, which came out in 1949, when Sheilah Graham was still alive, avoids mentioning her by name. Bruccoli also tells us, reassuringly if a bit bluntly, of Fitzgerald's maturing daughter: "Scottie liked Sheilah, who went to considerable trouble making her California visits pleasant." It is André Le Vot, in a biography written in French and translated for Doubleday by William Byron, who gives the most favorable picture of Sheilah's role in Fitzgerald's last years; he describes her maneuvers to keep him sober and at peace, outlines the careful tutorials he gave her in Proust and Keats, and points out that this self-willed adventuress was "a heroine after Fitzgerald's heart." Le Vot quotes Helen Hayes as saying, "Sheilah Graham was good to Scott, but he wasn't nice enough to her—ever." Mr. Meyers paraphrases Hayes's remark in a way to redirect its sting: "The gentle Helen Hayes thought Sheilah

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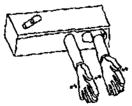

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was good to Scott, but that he treated her badly because (as Mankiewicz had implied) 'she represented to Scott's fevered mind the second-rate he had fallen into.' "

The difference is slight, but in the art of biography, which recycles the same basic facts and letters and reminiscences, *tone* is all-important. What Joseph Mankiewicz—the producer-writer under whom Fitzgerald worked for a time—implied is passed on to the reader: Sheilah Graham was second-rate, by a lofty but unspecified standard. And so, Meyers repeatedly leads us to feel, was Scott Fitzgerald. Notice the verb in this sentence: "Aware of his own intellectual limitations, he struggled to improve his mind until the very end of his life." "Struggled"—as opposed to, say, "endeavored" or "worked"—suggests that it was a strenuous but losing battle. We learn that "Fitzgerald's novels . . . are filled with hundreds of ludicrous orthographical, grammatical and factual errors," that "he wrote in pencil with his left hand and had a large, loopy handwriting that looked like a child's," and that, according to Glenway Wescott, "Fitzgerald must have been the worst educated man in the world." Fitzgerald's poor record at Princeton and his bad French are drummed upon: "He never bothered to learn more than taxi-cab French nor made the slightest effort to pronounce it correctly. Even Scottie, who soon mastered the tongue, later remarked on 'his really horrendous French' and 'his atrocious accent.' "

Mr. Meyers stalks his hapless hero with a lot of somewhat pat psychologizing; e.g., "Fitzgerald's sudden wealth and fame created emotional and intellectual problems. He felt guilty because he did not deserve these blessings." Zelda becomes a layered confection: "There was a hardness beneath Zelda's soft exterior, and underneath that hardness a more vulnerable inner core." Meyers' biography moves swiftly, but at the possible price of giving short shrift. Considering the wealth of written testimony left not only by Fitzgerald (a great saver, for all his uneconomic behavior, of drafts and journals and carbons of letters) but by Sheilah Graham and Zelda, who had a verbal flair of her own, Meyers severely rations direct quotation. It is a pleasure to turn from his summary of events to the actual texts in which Fitzgerald accounted for his life as he saw it—the letters, especially, and the autobiographical pieces assembled by Edmund Wilson in "The Crack-Up." We breathe there real air, braced by the dry clarity of Fitzgerald's self-regard. What sticks in the mind from Meyers' parade of anecdotes is the dreamlike bizarrerie:

> Fitzgerald owned a bloodcurdling collection of photograph albums of horribly mutilated soldiers, stereopticon slides of executions and roasted aviators, and lavishly illustrated French tomes of living men whose faces had been chewed away by shrapnel. In a remarkably morbid letter of December 1927, he told Hemingway: "I have a new German war book, *Die Krieg Against Krieg*, which shows men who mislaid their faces in Picardy and the Caucasus—you can imagine how I thumb it over, my mouth fairly slathering with fascination."

Ten years later: "And during a drunken flight to Chicago in the fall of 1937, accompanying Sheilah, who was to make a national radio broadcast, he told all the passengers what 'a great lay' she was. After calling Sheilah 'a silly bitch' and punching her sponsor at the radio station, Fitzgerald summoned Gingrich to his room in the Drake Hotel. As the editor sobered him up by shovelling steak into his mouth, the food dribbled onto his bib and he tried to bite Gingrich's hand." FAMOUS AUTHOR BITES HAND THAT EDITS HIM. From *The National Enquirer* to inarguably zealous scholars, the contemporary approach to celebrities reduces them to a set of antics and ailments to which we can feel superior. Intentionally or not, Mr. Meyers absolves us from ever again having to take Scott Fitzgerald seriously.

WELL, and how seriously *should* we take him? His reputation has survived better than that of all but a few of his contemporaries. His prose can be exquisite, and the something wavering and divided in his purposes does not much trouble the connoisseurs of textual self-betrayal who run our English departments. "The Great Gatsby" is one of the most commonly assigned texts in college courses in American literature, and the bulk of the œuvre stays in print. Within the last six months, a book of essays, "The Great Gatsby and Modern Times," by Ronald Berman, has been published by the University of Illinoi Press, and an apparatus- and facsimile-laden edition of "The Last Tycoon," ed ited by the busy Matthew J. Bruccoli (who gives the novel its more authentic, if dreadful, title, "The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western"), has appeared in the Cambridge University Press's definitive printing of Fitzgerald's works. Academia, intoxicated by his eternal undergraduate effluvium, has clasped Fitzgerald to its bosom. He was, like Wordsworth, a writer who in youth experienced something transcendent, and his reverence for the fading radiance of that revelation gave some life to his callow, mannered first two novels, and his glib, glittering mass-market short stories. "Life was a thing for youth," decides the heroine of "The Cut-Glass Bowl" (1920), and the operetta absurdities of "The Offshore Pirate" (1920) occasion this dithyramb:

> Her sigh was a benediction—an ecstatic surety that she was youth and beauty now as much as she would ever know. For another instant life was radiant and time a phantom and their strength eternal.

He is an author one should read when young. To readers past first bloom, his earnest reconstructions of adolescent and collegiate maneuvers of self-advancement may seem a bit archeological, and his insistence upon the moonlit mood of romantic—that is, early sexual—attraction a bit arrested. In "The Great Gatsby," everything works because Fitzgerald has split himself in two, and the shrewd, detached voice of Nick Carraway—a junior version of Conrad's ruminative narrators—objectifies the romantically enraptured and deluded Gatsby. Yet the distance is not so great that the observation becomes heartless satire, though there is much comedy here, as when Daisy sobs over her knightly lover's preposterously lavish array of imported English shirts, or when Tom sputters indignantly about the decline of Western civilization. Carraway and Gatsby are Midwestern doppelgängers in the moral jungles of the East, so similar that the author can hardly trouble to describe either man: Gatsby dawns on Carraway as "a man about my age" sitting at the same table, and never becomes more physically distinct than "an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd." All of Fitzgerald's day[illegible]ns of luxury and romantic mission [illegible]rust onto this vague figure, and the

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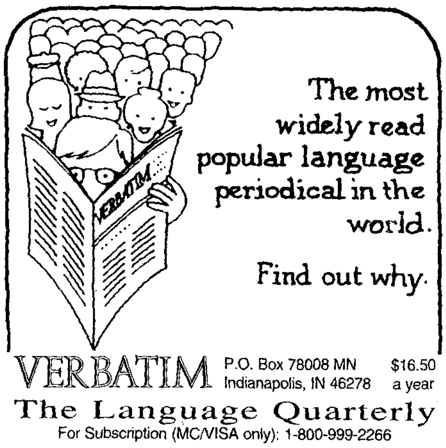
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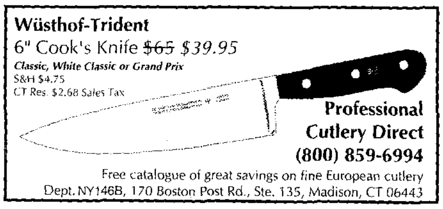
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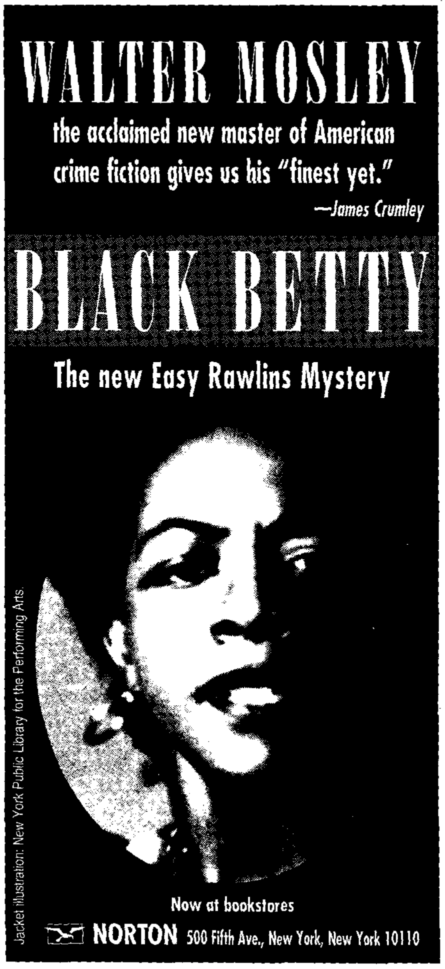
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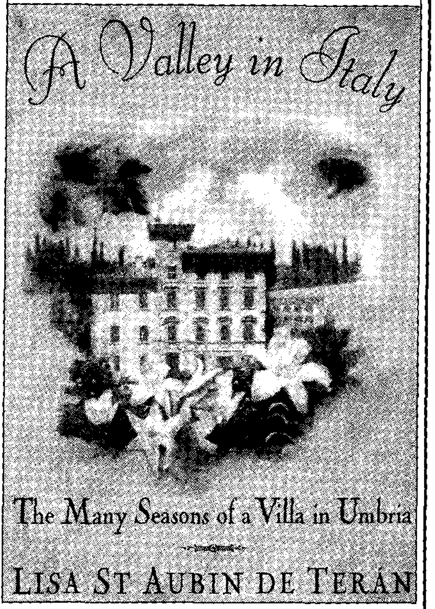

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writer's keenness of sight and music of phrase are left to Carraway. Happily, in this superbly fortunate novel—"Few books come into this world with the perfection of a bird's egg," Wright Morris has said, "and this is one of them"—what Carraway doesn't know and what Fitzgerald can't imagine function as forceful blanks on the canvas, giving largeness to what might be small if it were known. The reader's own romantic propensities are usefully engaged in the swift, sure unfolding of this efficient and hauntingly expansive "anecdote," as H. L. Mencken called it. The novel's significant elements—Gatsby's shimmering parties, the Buchanans' opulently chaste household, the wilderness of ash heaps where Dr. Eckleburg's giant eyes preside, the overripe torpidity of summer Manhattan, Wolfsheim and his world of crime, Tom and his burly wealth, the downtrodden and violent Wilsons, the apparition of pathetic Henry Gatz at the end—are carried to the point of caricature but with the reward of a penetrating vividness, not unlike that of "The Scarlet Letter." It is all as bright and implausibly plausible as a movie.

But in "Tender Is the Night" and, as best its fragments indicate, in "The Last Tycoon" romanticism is not the thing viewed but the viewing lens, and the author keeps asking us to take the characters at a valuation that his evidence doesn't support. Enchantment is supposed to cling to the prattle and muddled contretemps of a social set of tedious expatriate wastrels, and a couple, the Divers, are meant to loom heroically without first becoming real. A thick coating of ascribed glamour obscures their human details, and a fog of narcissism and hidden pleading hopelessly dampens what is meant to be a crisp and colorful panorama. The novel gets better in the long flashback, where Fitzgerald uses the experience of sanitariums and psychiatrists that Zelda's illness brought him after 1930, but a deep and disturbing problem of transposition remains: Sara and Gerald Murphy, the consummate hosts, have been turned into Scott and Zelda, quintessential guests, unruly and ingrate, at the feast of life. Hemingway, in a letter of criticism that he later softened, complained, "You took liberties with people's pasts and futures that produced not people but damned marvelously faked case histories." We who knew neither the Fitzgeralds nor the Murphys know only that character traits fail to cohere, events bob up and down in a fathomless sea, and the story obstinately declines to grab our interest. In contrast, "Gatsby" deftly picks up its adventure at the start and projects one cinematically sharp, surprising scene after another. The length of time that Fitzgerald took with "Tender Is the Night" and his worsening situation as he worked no doubt contributed to the book's essential incoherence; he was trying simultaneously to recapture the poignance of the careless expatriate life he and Zelda had experienced in the twenties and to explain to himself the derangement and impotence that had overtaken them in the thirties. "The Last Tycoon" is even more scattered in its effects; certainly Fitzgerald's vision of heroism in the real moviemaker Irving Thalberg is not perceptibly realized in his morose image of the fictional Monroe Stahr. As in the first part of "Tender Is the Night," the author chose to center the narrative in the consciousness of an infatuated young female, perhaps in the hope that the charm of the narrator's exterior would rub off on her tale. But the reader feels merely blinkered.

What is "Tender Is the Night" about? The title Fitzgerald arrived at tells us nothing, whereas his working title, "Doctor Diver's Holiday: A Romance," delimits its episode—a nine-year marriage, lived mostly in Europe, between a psychiatrist and a patient, which ends when the patient is cured. Mental health passes between them like a baton, and Nicole's cleared head becomes finally a place where the reader is happy to be. The scene where she takes Tommy Barban as her lover is the finest fruit of Fitzgerald's predilection for female points of view. But the path to it was littered with too many revisions, too many scenes discarded in the search for the novel's troubled heart. "There were so many revisions of *Tender* that I don't know what I left in it and what I didn't leave in it finally," he confessed to Maxwell Perkins in 1934.

The best book from the second h
Fitzgerald's career may be the one lf of
his fellow-Princetonian Edmund W
put together for him, posthumou
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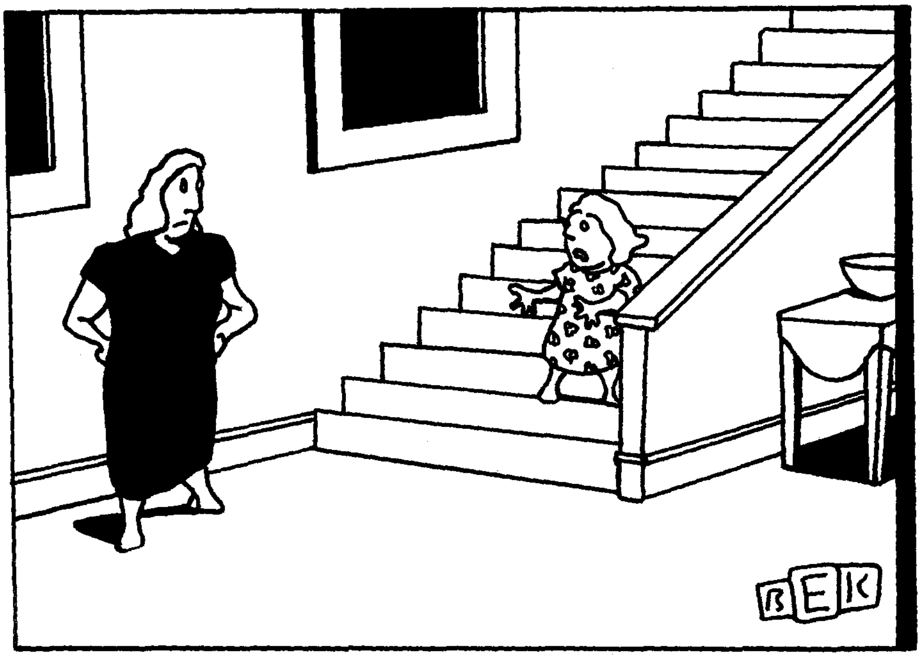
what Glenway Wescott called "brief easy fiery phrases"; pieces of magazine humor, sometimes turned out with Zelda as collaborator; dazzlingly disembodied jottings from his notebooks, grouped by him under antic and alphabetical headings; letters to friends and, in his most grave and affectionate voice, to his daughter; and tributes and appraisals, rhymed and unrhymed, from friends—these varied items, in their fitful frivolity, lustre, grace, and cavalier honesty, dance us along the length and breadth of Fitzgerald's talent and hint at what remained when his wife, his money, his fame, and his health had all been taken from him.

His excessively dewy writing dried up in the thirties. His last fictions were skeletal, wispy anecdotes concerning a Hollywood loser, the scrabbling and unscrupulous and even unhandsome scriptwriter Pat Hobby. Unlike the overplotted and overcozy Tarkingtonian fantastications on middle-class themes that he turned out for the *Post* and *Liberty*, the Pat Hobby stories feel feeble but unforced; like good John O'Hara, they have the near-shapelessness of the authentic. And some of the later *Post* stories—"Magnetism" (1928), "The Rough Crossing" (1929), "The Bridal Party" (1930), "Babylon Revisited" (1931)—are among his best, skillful but not slick, heartfelt but not narcissistic. The fuzz of glamour has been scorched away, and in "The Rough Crossing"—downright Conradian in its descriptions of ship and sea—Fitzgerald manages to give us a sketch of Zelda that captures at once her bohemian charm, her wifely weariness, her masked desperation, and her abrupt insanity.

He had a hard time depicting Zelda, whether as the Nicole of "Tender Is the Night" or as the Gloria Gilbert of "The Beautiful and the Damned." Love and—to the considerable extent that he and Zelda were twins, in neat, hawk-eyed looks and reckless temperament—self-love got in the way. What Freud called "the normal overestimation of the sexual object characteristic of men" muddies a writer's work when he tries to transfer to print an untransferrable fascination. In loving fictional women—Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina and Hester Prynne, say—we like to feel we are outdoing the creator, who is merely giving the facts. Love is an exercise, after all, in freedom and choice, a moving forward into the faintest hint, and there is more of its essence in the quick glimpses grouped, in Fitzgerald's notebooks, under the heading "Descriptions of Girls" than in his insistent selling of Gloria or Nicole to the reader. In truth, Fitzgerald's feelings about Zelda were a rich and dark brew; Mr. Meyers articulates, as no other biographer has, the groom's sensation in 1920 that the bride's family had fobbed off on him defective goods. Zelda's mother gave him, just before the wedding, a sly warning—"It will take more than the Pope to make Zelda good"—and late in the thirties Scott wrote Zelda brutally:



"I don't just want to write. I want to be in literary feuds."

• •

> [Your mother] chose me . . . and you submitted at the moment of our marriage when your passion for me was at as low ebb as mine for you—because she thought romantically that her projection of herself in you could best be shown through me. I never wanted the Zelda I married. I didn't love you again till after you became pregnant. . . . You were the drunk—at *seventeen*, before I knew you . . . you had been seduced and provincially outcast.

And he wrote his daughter, in one of the testament-like advisory letters, "I decided to marry your mother after all, even though I knew she was spoiled and meant no good to me. I was sorry immediately I had married her." On the other hand, his becoming a successful writer to win her hand, after an initial rejection, was the feat that made him, in his sense of himself, a romantic hero; like Jay Gatsby, he wooed above his social station while in "the invisible cloak of his uniform" and "committed himself to the following of a grail." What might be read as the last word on the most important person in his life came in his last letter to Scottie, written the month he died:

> But be sweet to your mother at Xmas despite her early Chaldean rune-worship which she will undoubtedly inflict on you at Xmas. [Zelda in her unbalance had become a fanatic Christian.] Her letters are tragically brilliant on all matters except those of central importance. How strange to have failed as a social creature—even criminals do not fail that way—they are the law's "Loyal Opposition," so to speak. But the insane are always mere guests on earth, eternal strangers carrying around broken decalogues that they cannot read.

The dryly eulogistic words have an undercurrent of triumph; in the married competition between these two cracked angels, he had won—he had stayed sane.

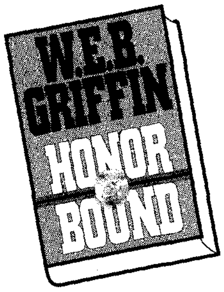
Fitzgerald should be honored, as a writer, for attempting to describe the American life of his time with all the refinement of European fiction; from imitating the smartness of Shaw and Wells and Compton Mackenzie he moved to an attempt to absorb the examples of Conrad and Turgenev and Tolstoy and Proust. Not for him an invented American style, brashly experimental like those of Hemingway and Faulkner: unlike theirs, his style is hard to parody, blended as it is of poetry and aperçu, of external detail quickly transmuted to internal sensation. His American characters, from small-town children to uproariously disintegrating sophisticates, receive a respectful and tender attention. He loved Americans and took comfort in their aura; the hero of "Babylon Revisited," returning to Paris after the Crash, finds "the stillness in the Ritz bar . . . strange and portentous. It was not an American bar any more—he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it. It had gone back into France." The matter of America was much on Fitzgerald's mind, without the braggadocio of Wolfe or Whitman but thoughtfully, in contemplation of a spiritual puzzle. Gatsby balances on the dashboard of his car "with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games." Later in the book comes the abrupt observation "Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry." And so on—the book concludes, a touch thunderously, with its celebrated paean to virgin Long Island, "a fresh, green breast of the new world," wherein man came "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." To Henry James's observations of our precious and vulnerable innocence abroad Fitzgerald added notes on our capacity for correspondingly unqualified corruption and despair.

His own corruption—by drink, but, more centrally, by a wish to make his life, as well as his art, something glorious—is to his discredit, yet perhaps, after adding up Mr. Meyers' tabulation of his vanities and buffooneries and wastefulness, we might remember, too, how hard he worked, albeit with gin on his desk and not always at projects he knew in his heart to be worthy. "Have written two good short stories and three cheap ones," he wrote to Edmund Wilson in 1921, and, in 1924, "I really worked hard as hell last winter—but it was all trash and it nearly broke my heart as well as my iron constitution." It was too bad he could make the distinction between "good" and "cheap," or "trash," in his mind, especially since many of the stories bought by *The Saturday Evening Post*, at its tremendous rates, had their merits, as popular art sometimes does. But all art must be sincere, or the artist's moral fibre begins to fray. To Mencken he wrote in 1925:

> My trash for the Post grows worse and worse as there is less and less heart in it. Strange to say, my whole heart was in my first trash. I thought that "The Offshore Pirate" was as good as "Benediction."

Fiction began as a genre for the populace, a kind of news, a plume of the print explosion, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with a writer's hoping to make a living from it. But Fitzgerald's extravagance outran his income almost immediately, and the romanticism he shared with the American public was not enough for sales on the scale of Booth Tarkington's or Edna Ferber's or Zane Grey's or even Sinclair Lewis's. His most successful novels, the first two, sold somewhat more than forty thousand copies each (in a country with less than half the population of the present-day United States), and "Gatsby," disappointingly, twenty-five thousand, and "Tender Is the Night" a devastating thirteen thousand. An ordinary American family could have lived for two years on what one of his short stories fetched from the *Post*, but he and Zelda did not run an ordinary family, and his little essay "How to Live on $36,000 a Year" makes a joke of it. In the end, only Hollywood could offer the kind of money he needed, and there he was lost in the machinations of an art geared for the masses. Since in many ways he thought like Hollywood ("Gatsby" cries out for adaptation, and has received it three times), his failure there baffled him. "To say I'm disillusioned is putting it mildly," he wrote Joseph Mankiewicz after seeing the producer's revisions of a script Fitzgerald had long labored upon. "For nineteen years . . . I've written best-selling entertainment. . . . I'm a good writer, honest." How sad that he had to be the one to say it.

Alternative, less disastrous destinies for Fitzgerald—as a hardboiled entertainer with no modernist aspirations, as an avant-garde writer with an abstemious, modest life style—might have prolonged his life, but then his life wouldn't have made so good a story. The early death of a writer, besides shortening by a few unwritten volumes the shelves of books that weigh on our consciences, confirms our instinct that art, especially the literary art, should be sublimely difficult—a current from beyond that burns out the wire. ♦



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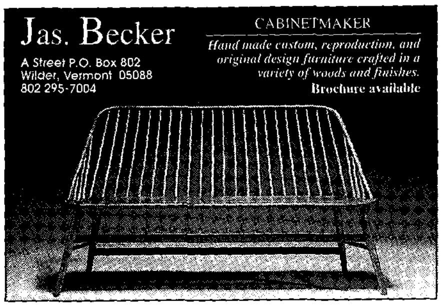


BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

FICTION

The Waterworks

by E. L. Doctorow

(Random House; $23)

THIS artful gothic entertainment draws upon Doctorow's fascination with historical New York and his strong sense of social malaise—of dark forces conspiring behind the scenes. The tale takes place in 1871 and is told by a man whose only given name is McIlvaine and whose occupation of newspaper editor is belied by a windy, philosophical style and a romantic predilection for the three dots of ellipsis. A freelance contributor, Martin Pemberton, claims to have spotted his dead father, a crusty robber baron, riding with some other dazed-looking old men in a municipal omnibus up Broadway; while pursuing the mystery, young Pemberton disappears. The winding trail, cunningly spun out with flashbacks and foreshadowings, leads eventually to a diabolically clever scientist called Sartorius, who is undertaking advanced experiments in human biology upon waifs and millionaires, within aeries hidden in an East Side orphanage and the Croton waterworks. Everything turns, drips, and pours in this humid narrative, which is most interesting in its casually worn period details and least persuasive in its effort to inflate Boss Tweed and his villainous metropolis into cosmic symbols of "this other disordered existence . . . that our ministers warn us against . . . that our dreams perceive" (ellipses not ours).

House of Splendid Isolation

by Edna O'Brien

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $21)

O'BRIEN applies her highly visceral style to Ireland's current troubles in a tense thriller that also manages to be a reflection on the meaning of home. McGreevy (Mac, to his comrades), a murderous I.R.A. terrorist on the run, is used to camping out in barns at night, laying his head on plastic manure bags. He finds grander accommodations when, uninvited, he moves into the bottom floor of a slightly tatty mansion inhabited by Josie, an elderly widow. Mac demands that Josie behave as though all were normal—she is not to change her weekly grocery order "by even one packet of biscuits"—while he is essentially holding her hostage in her own house, which, as it happens, is haunted by a past almost as fraught with bloody deeds as Mac's. Both Josie's uncle and her husband were shot and killed in the struggles of the previous generation, and her brief marriage was an induction into the more intimate brutality of domestic violence. In fact, O'Brien's finely tuned sense of the war between men and women is even more riveting than the high-wire plot she delivers, as Josie and Mac, fierce loners for different reasons, do a kind of lovers' dance—alternately despising, pitying, and attempting to understand one another. (Josie tells herself that Mac won't kill her because, quite simply, he has a mother somewhere.) Gradually, through an accumulation of cups of tea and feints toward trust, they come to share a wary near-friendship that the reader thrills to somewhat guiltily, since it can end only in disaster.

Annunciation

by David Plante

(Ticknor & Fields; $21.95)

THIS masterly novel, written without irony or humor, is baroquely plotted and yet is so far from melodrama that it suggests the asceticism of certain works of religious art. The story involves the quest for such a work, a lost Annunciation by an obscure and suicidal Lucchese painter of the seventeenth century. An art historian named Claire O'Connel—the widow of a suicide and the mother of a tormented sixteen-year-old, for whom she fears the same fate—is doing research on Pietro Testa when she turns up a reference to the elsewhere uncatalogued painting. The search eventually brings mother and daughter into touch with Claude Ricard, an art-book editor grappling with his own deepening despair. Although all these characters are in states of accelerating crisis, Plante treats them respectfully, as individuals, and doesn't push the parallels. Painting is discussed a great deal, in the same straightforward manner that the author and his characters use to talk about matters of faith: without embarrassed restraint but with seriousness and tact. Still, words will go only so far, Plante seems to think, and after that you have to trust in metaphors, in images. In prose so clear and ingenuous that it is almost awkward, he achieves a Dostoyevskian intensity (Russia, fittingly, figures as a leitmotif), and the state of a reader's own faith is not likely to hinder its impact. At the end, although Claude has formed an image of God, he has not become a believer.

Thank You for Smoking

by Christopher Buckley

(Random House; $22)

BUCKLEY takes aim at political correctness and incorrectness alike in this gleefully venomous sendup of Washington's "sin lobbyists." Nick Naylor's career as a TV reporter came to an untimely end when he mistakenly announced to the nation that the President had choked to death. Now, as chief spokesman for the Academy of Tobacco Studies—perhaps the toughest job in D.C.—Nick is on a mission to assure the nation that millions of people are not choking to death from cigarettes. Why would anyone do such a thing? Certainly not for the comparisons to Goebbels. Nick's reasons: to pay the mortgage and his son's tuition at prestigious St. Euthanasius. But it's also clear that Nick gets off on his stunning mastery of disingenuousness, deliberate ambiguity, and outright misinformation. Buckley makes sure we get off on it, too; we can't help warming up to Nick when he manages, on "Oprah," to get a chemo-bald, cancer-stricken teen-ager on his side. Such P.R. coups give Nick national recognition, but not everyone is convinced that smoking retards Parkinson's disease and that America's most lethal health threat is Vermont cheddar cheese. Jeannette, his latex-obsessed colleague at A.T.S., and Heather, a vixeny reporter at the *Moon*, certainly seem friendly enough, but what about the Peter Lorre soundalike who abducts him and plasters his body with nicotine patches? As the smoke rings tighten around him, Nick learns the hard way that tobacco really does "take care of its own." ♦

SHOUTS AND MURMURS

AUTHORS WITH THE MOST

Mr. Blackwell, the fashion arbiter, rates the great American writers.

BY FRANK GANNON

HERMAN MELVILLE

We've seen the whale thing before and someone please tell this man that Biblical names are clever to post-office workers but not to anyone else. And you would have thought he might have heard that having someone named Bartleby who works in a law office and says "I prefer not to" is not exactly a fertile field for a tent and caterers on a Sunday. Herman grew up and wanted to become a major American writer but he seems to have forgotten that you don't go on a three-year voyage and invite only guys. Drab. Drab. Drab. A big white whale. Aren't we original? Reading Herman Melville reminds me of the time I tried to have a conversation with Donovan.

EMILY DICKINSON

Oh, Emily, are you in there? What has this tiresome woman been doing with herself? One would hope something more than writing more poems about old Mister Death. Hey, Miss Dickinson, there was a funeral in your brain, and guess who the flowers are for? I'll send you a note, Em—do read it. I don't want to hear any more from you about "drunken bees."

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Is there a better way to clear out a room than saying the word "Puritan"? I had my fill of those dreadful black pointy hats at Thanksgiving. And that business about wearing a *letter* for punishment? No thanks, Hawthorne. I finished high school a long time ago, but when I *was* in high school I would never have been caught hanging around with losers like you.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Poor Thoreau. He spent so much time alone that he started to think he was the most interesting person in the room. Yes, Henry, do go on about your bean rows. Do you mind if I hang myself first? I once read Henry asking the pointed question "Shall I go to heaven or a-fishing?" All I can say to someone who uses the word "a-fishing" is "Gaak!" I don't care which one it is, but *do* go, Henry. Goodbye.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

He always seems to have just gotten off of a particularly nasty bus, and I picture him with an expression like one of those Mary Quant-manqués we had all over the place in the sixties. Always insisting that literature didn't have any *function*, it was just capital letters: ART. And the way the French carried him around on their shoulders! You know what people say, make one thing that appeals to reason and emotion simultaneously and you'll never be rid of the French. That's the way they are.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

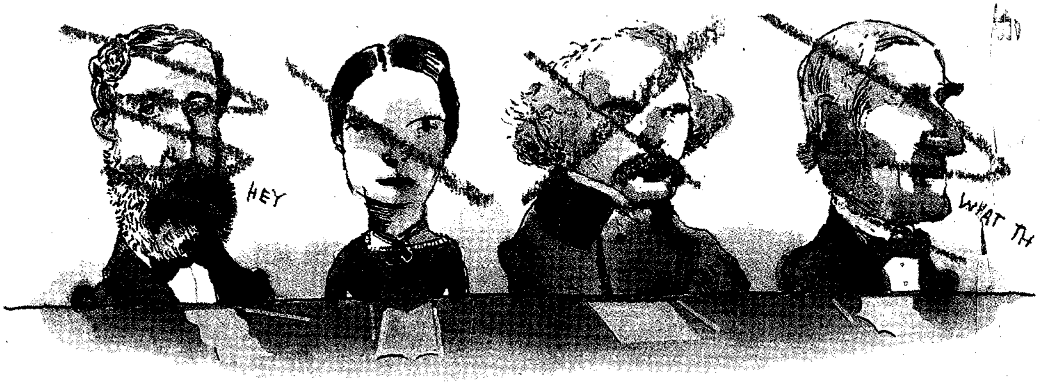
Will someone shoot down this multicolored blimp from the sky? Please. If we promise to introduce you to some nice people, will you get it done? We will all live happily ever after if someone sends this man a telegram that says, "Hello, Wads, this is reality. You wrote 'The tide rises, the tide falls' three times in the same poem. We don't need that."

AMY LOWELL

What's with the cigars, Amy *mia*? Could be you've entered the wrong contest here. Candidates for the Edward G. Robinson Memorial Bowl are meeting over at the Statler. Hurry.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Should have "Rich and Bulgy" carved on his gravestone. The essay has just about vanished from the world of writing, and it's not surprising considering what Mr. Oversoul did to it. Overbearing is more like it. Waldo talked about self-reliance but what he should have said was "self-indulgence." It's frightening that in 1994, decades after we sent a man to the moon, somebody still needs to say, "I am sorry, Madam, no one here reads Ralph Waldo Emerson." ♦



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